

JASON DAY

MUSCLES UP AT THE PGA

BY ALAN SHIPNUCK // P. 32

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Sports Illustrated

WHY ST. LOUIS
IS AN UNKILLABLE,
UNSTOPPABLE FORCE

CARDINALS RULE

BY BEN REITER // P. 22

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THE BEAUTIFUL MIND
ON THE RAVENS' O-LINE

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LINEUP

8.24.15

2015 / VOLUME 123 / NO. 7



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Dilip Vishwanat/
Getty Images

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Sports Illustrated

—
SI.COM

FOR AUG. 24, 2015



Long Division

As NFL teams get ready to make their cuts, SI.com weighs in with its predictions for the season, beginning with division-by-division previews of the NFC. Are the Giants still in good hands with **Odell Beckham Jr.** [13]? Can reigning MVP **Aaron Rodgers** [12] guide the Packers back to a Super Bowl? Will **Marshawn Lynch** [24] stay in beast mode in Seattle for another year? Go to SI.com/nfl for a breakdown of the conference, including our dark-horse team, rookies to watch and the coach with the most to prove. Then check out The MMQB's redesigned site at mmqb.si.com

SI.COM'S TOP STORIES

1 A Fallen Giant

For a roundup of last week's most popular stories on SI.com—including Doug Farrar's tribute to Giants legend and former ABC sportscaster **Frank Gifford**—go to SI.com/topstories



2 A Modern Superteam

Despite injuries and a mediocre offense, the Cardinals are again atop the NL

3 Brady vs. Goodell

Legal takeaways from the Deflategate federal court hearing in New York City

4 Must See

Ben Golliver breaks down the top 50 games on the 2015-16 NBA calendar

5 Buffalo Stampede

Why Bills coach Rex Ryan claimed former Jets linebacker IK Enemkpali

SI Digital Bonus

Fresh Legs

From the SI Vault
Aug. 4, 1997



For better or worse, the **Bills** have taken on a strikingly new look

By **Peter King**

To read this and other stories from the *SPORTS ILLUSTRATED* archive, go to SI.com/vault



Road to Recovery

Unfortunately, injuries are all too common in sports. But how do injuries—not to mention nagging

wear and tear on the body—affect a player's ability not only to play again but also to return to peak form? For an in-depth look at injured athletes and their hard roads back to competition, go to SI.com/thecomeback, a new series from the editors of *SPORTS ILLUSTRATED* and WebMD.

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+

1
of
3**Leading
Off**

Major Dad

■ Before Jason Day could receive the Wanamaker Trophy for winning the PGA Championship at Whistling Straits, he had to come to grips with his three-year-old son, Dash, on Sunday in Kohler, Wis. After a series of disappointments on golf's biggest stages, the 27-year-old Day fired a 67 in the final round to hold off Jordan Spieth and earn his first major title, finishing at 20 under par, a record for a Grand Slam event (page 32).

PHOTOGRAPH BY
ROBERT BECK
FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED







+

2
3**Leading
Off**

Poppin' Jay

■ While Bears quarterback Jay Cutler was attempting to work out his preseason kinks, completing 4 of 7 passes for 42 yards, Pro Bowl defensive end Cameron Wake of the Dolphins appeared to be in midseason sacking form last Thursday in Chicago. The Bears won 27-10.

PHOTOGRAPH BY
JONATHAN DANIEL
GETTY IMAGES



STIFFI

Lilly

AVAI

AVAI

P&G

P&G



STANLEY

KSM

+

33



Leading
Off

The Flight Fantastic

■ Simone Biles scored a 16.25 on this vault—an Amanar $2\frac{1}{2}$ twist with a blind landing—to surge into first place last Thursday at the P&G Gymnastics Championships in Indianapolis. The 18-year-old from Columbus, Ohio, won her third straight U.S. title with a two-round total of 124.100, a whopping 4.950 points better than Maggie Nichols. Biles, a two-time world champion, is unbeaten in her last nine meets.

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY
JOHN CHENG
USA GYMNASTICS

INBOX

FOR AUG. 10, 2015



You missed one of the best trick plays of all time: the Globe of Death. With 22 seconds left in Idaho State's 24-20 upset of Boise State on Sept. 12, 1992, Bengals return man Robert Johnson hauled in a kickoff at the 12-yard line. ISU's players huddled around Johnson before taking off in different directions, with each player pretending he had the ball. Johnson ran it back 50 yards against the confused Broncos, before receiver Rommie Wheeler scored the winning touchdown two plays later.

Mark Liptak, Chubbuck, Idaho



POINT AFTER

Phil Taylor was spot-on when he wrote that Tom Brady should take a knee and accept his NFL suspension. There are only two possible outcomes here: being perceived as a victim or as a villain. Better to be seen as the former than to do more damage to yourself or to the game.

John P. Reilly, Midlothian, Va.

Let's suppose the headline of Taylor's essay was misprinted as "Take a Knee, Thom Brady." ESPN claims the typo is a form of plagiarism because its magazine has printed it before. Time Inc. announces an investigation about the typo and the alleged plagiarism claims. Taylor is questioned, but he says he knows nothing. The story's fact checker also says that he was unaware that ESPN had published the same typo. Time Inc. thinks they are both lying, that it must have been a collaboration between the two, and suspends Taylor for four months. Would he then take a knee?

Jim Perry, Stoughton, Mass.

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COVER



Great job with your College Football Preview—well, except **Notre Dame** in the College Football Playoff. How could you choose the Irish ahead of Alabama, Baylor, Michigan State and Oregon?

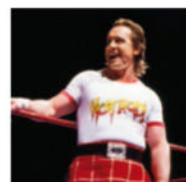
Bob Robinson
Lake Oswego, Ore.



I was disappointed to see you link Ultimate Frisbee with being a **hippie**, as if all players are laid-back stoners. The athleticism of its players often rivals football's.

R. Philip Grizzard
Normal, Ill.

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20



I loved your tribute to **Rowdy Roddy Piper**. His tough guy quote—"I do exactly what I want to do. You say I'm insane, I say Thank you very much"—sounds like a Donald Trump campaign slogan.

Joe Ewens
Summerville, S.C.

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23

ROUND IS OUT. THE SCOOP HOLDER IS IN.



Hate the old-fashioned protein tub? Everyone does. That's why we redesigned it. All of it. The result? The **EAS Building Block** with a built-in scoop holder and a pop-off lid. This is where we'd tell you about the uncompromising EAS 100% Whey protein inside, but let's be honest, we had you at "scoop holder," didn't we?

Eric Ebron
Tight End, Detroit

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SCORECARD

Best Year Ever

Triple Crowns, Grand Slams and near-perfect seasons: 2015 is the year sports fans dream of and oddsmakers can't predict

BY BEN BASKIN

Illustration by NICOLAS RAPP

ON THAT FIRST Sunday in February we should have known something special was brewing. When Super Bowl XLIX was decided on a last-second goal line interception—the Patriots had just a 15.6% chance of winning before that ill-fated play—it prefigured a sports year that would make a mockery of the odds.

By early April, Kentucky headed to the Final Four seeking to become the first team to go undefeated since 1976. The Cats' run at perfection proved

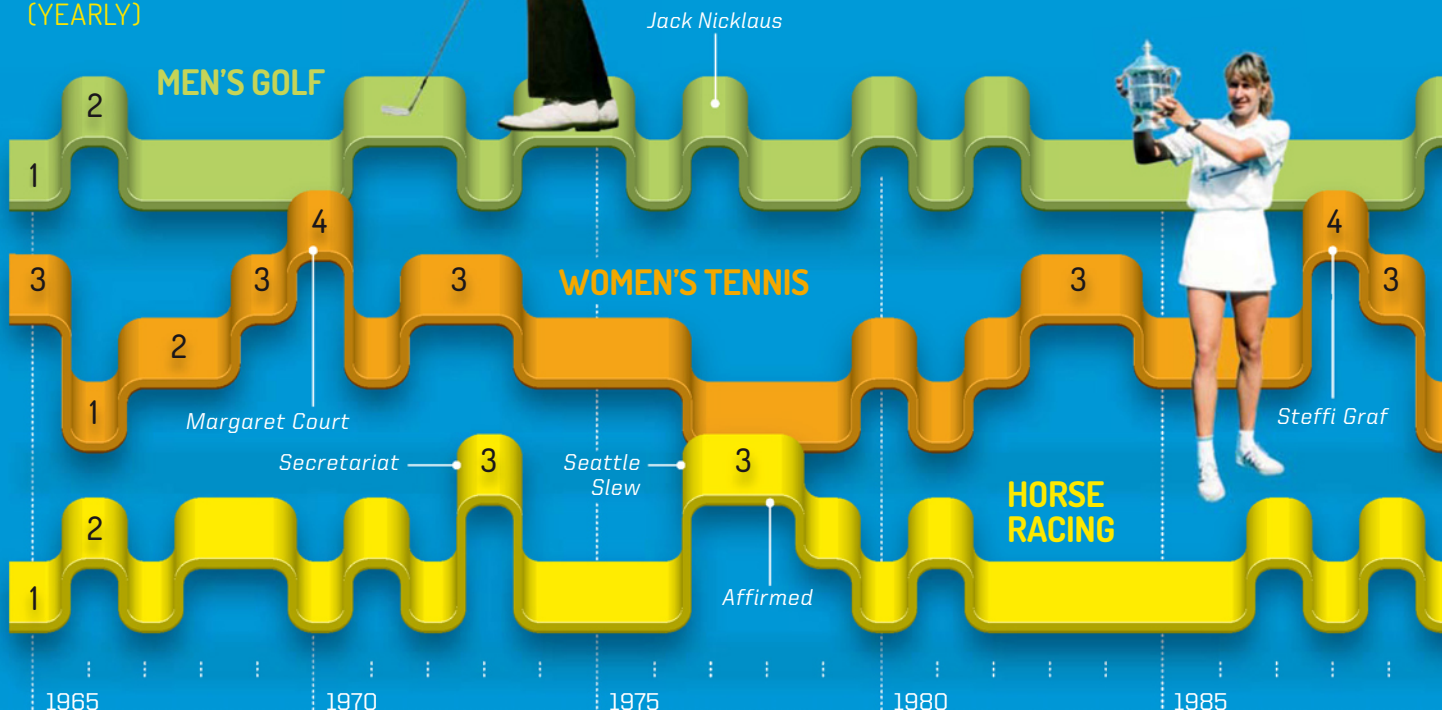
to be a tease. But on the first Saturday in June, American Pharoah won the Belmont and, with it, the Triple Crown, the first horse to do so since 1978.

Five Saturdays later, Serena Williams won the Wimbledon women's singles title, her fourth straight major, and she heads into next month's U.S. Open on the threshold of a true Grand Slam, a feat no player has reeled off since 1988.

Then there was Jordan Spieth. With victories in the Masters and U.S. Open, a fourth at the British Open and a second at the PGA, the 22-year-old posted the all-time lowest cumulative score in a season's majors (−54) and rose to No. 1.

What are the chances of these things happening individually? What about in the same year? Statistician Ed Feng quantified the likelihood—or lack thereof.

MAXIMUM NUMBER OF MAJOR COMPETITIONS WON BY ONE ATHLETE (YEARLY)



1 in 522,675

COMBINED ODDS OF THE FOUR ITEMS BELOW AND SPIETH WINNING TWO OF FOUR MAJORS IN THE SAME YEAR (.000191%)

1 in 3.5

**US TO WIN WOMEN'S
WORLD CUP**
[28.6%]

1 in 9.9

AMERICAN PHAROAH TO WIN THE TRIPLE CROWN BY MARKET ODDS BEFORE EACH RACE [10.1%]

1 in 17.7

KENTUCKY TO GO 38-0 LAST SEASON
[5.7%]

1 in 70.4

**SERENA WILLIAMS TO WIN
GRAND SLAM BY MARKET
ODDS BEFORE EACH TOURNAY**
[1.4%]

1 in 3,118.5

**JORDAN SPIETH
TO WIN GRAND
SLAM BY MARKET
ODDS BEFORE EACH
TOURNEY**
[.03%]

Jordan Spieth

Tiger Woods

3

2

3

3

3

Serena Williams

3

American Pharoah

3

1990

1995

2000

2005

2010

2015

Best year ever? To uncover the best date in sports see page 60.

BASEBALL

+
Out and Safe

A minor leaguer gets help in breaking a barrier

LAST SATURDAY,

Brewers minor league first baseman David Denson came out to the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, making him the first openly gay active player affiliated with a major league team. (Sean Conroy, a pitcher in the independent Pacific Association, came out in June.) Denson's announcement came one day after defensive end Michael Sam, who in 2014 became the first openly gay player to be drafted by the NFL, tweeted that he was stepping away from the sport after playing one game for the CFL's Montreal Alouettes because, he wrote, "The last 12 months have been

very difficult for me, to the point where I became concerned with my mental health."

Sam didn't elaborate, but Denson could relate to that feeling. The 20-year-old told the *Journal Sentinel* that he battled depression before his revelation to his family and his Helena (Mont.) Brewers teammates. The struggles of Sam and Denson are a reminder that while players' coming out is an essential step in the acceptance and tolerance of gay athletes in sports, it remains a difficult one. Denson received guidance from

Billy Bean, a gay former major leaguer who is MLB's first Ambassador for Inclusion, and he got support from the entire Milwaukee organization and his fellow Rookie Leaguers. "They said, 'You're still our teammate. You're still our brother,'" Denson told the paper.

That response was encouraging. The barriers Sam and other pioneering gay athletes have broken are already making it easier for those who have followed them, raising hope that the day will soon arrive when such news really won't be news at all. —T.K.



GO FIGURE

7,443

Games before a Padres batter hit for the cycle. Last Friday outfielder Matt Kemp became the team's first, leaving the Marlins as the only franchise without a cycle.

1 in 32,678

Odds of all 15 MLB home teams winning on the same day, which happened for the first time on Aug. 11.

\$41.8 million

Value, based on current tuition rates, of 1,100 scholarships to the University of Akron that will be funded by LeBron James's foundation and the school in a partnership announced last Friday.

97

Straight home games without a loss for the U.S. women's soccer team, which shut out Costa Rica 8-0 on Sunday in its first match since winning the Women's World Cup on July 5.

BAD RAP

The sons of three prominent rappers signed up to play Division I football. So far the results are a lil mixed



Snoop Dogg > Cordell Broadus

The 6' 2", 195-pound four-star receiver accepted a scholarship

from the Bruins last winter but quit on Aug. 13. He's still at UCLA, but now he's studying film instead of game tape.



P Diddy > Justin Combs

A 5' 7", 170-pound junior DB, Combs has four career tackles at UCLA, but his father

attacked a Bruins assistant coach with a kettlebell in June and was arrested for assault. (The DA declined to file charges.)



Nate Dogg > Naijil Hale

The late rapper's son played in all 14 games and started two for Washington as

a 5' 10", 182-pound freshman cornerback, but on Aug. 6 he was kicked off the team for unspecified disciplinary reasons.

EXTRA MUSTARD



TROLL CALL

After a banner week in sports trolling—poking at the weaknesses and foibles of others—it makes sense to take a step back and review the highlights. Or are they lowlights?

+ Check out the SI Media podcast with Richard Deitsch each week for the latest buzz in sports at SI.com/podcast

- ▲ **Brady Sketch:** When a courtroom artist failed to capture Tom Brady's chiseled beauty, the Internet exploded in a stream of memes placing Ugly Tom in new contexts.
- **Nick Kyrgios:** During a tense match with No. 5 Stan Wawrinka, Kyrgios took the time to point out that Wawrinka's girlfriend had reportedly been untrue with another player.
- **Baylor:** The Bears claimed coincidence, but their team picture featured the players wearing numbers 61 and 58 lined up next to each other, re-creating the score of the team's win over archrival TCU last year.
- **Rex Ryan:** The former Jets coach signed linebacker IK Enemkpali one day after New York cut him for breaking the jaw of starting quarterback Geno Smith.
- **The Lions:** During their game against the Jets on Aug. 13 they piled on, following the announcement that Smith wouldn't play by blasting the song "Can't Feel My Face."
- **Brandon Coleman:** The Saints' second-year receiver signed autographs for fans who confused him with teammate and fellow wideout Marques Colston.



SIGN OF THE APOCALYPSE

Parma, the former Serie-A Italian soccer club relegated to the fourth tier, is in such poor financial shape that it's selling off trophies of past championships.



THEY SAID IT

"I'm just glad it's over with, because I had to pee since the fifth inning."

Lloyd McClendon

Mariners manager, who was reluctant to change anything during Hisashi Iwakuma's no-hit, 3-0 win against the Orioles on Aug. 12.



Eric Berry

The week T-Wolves coach Flip Saunders and Red Sox manager John Farrell announced they have lymphoma, the Chiefs safety returned after beating the disease.



Washington Generals

They were dumped by the Globetrotters. After 63 years of not playing defense, now they're expected to go away without taking offense.



TRAINING WITH

+

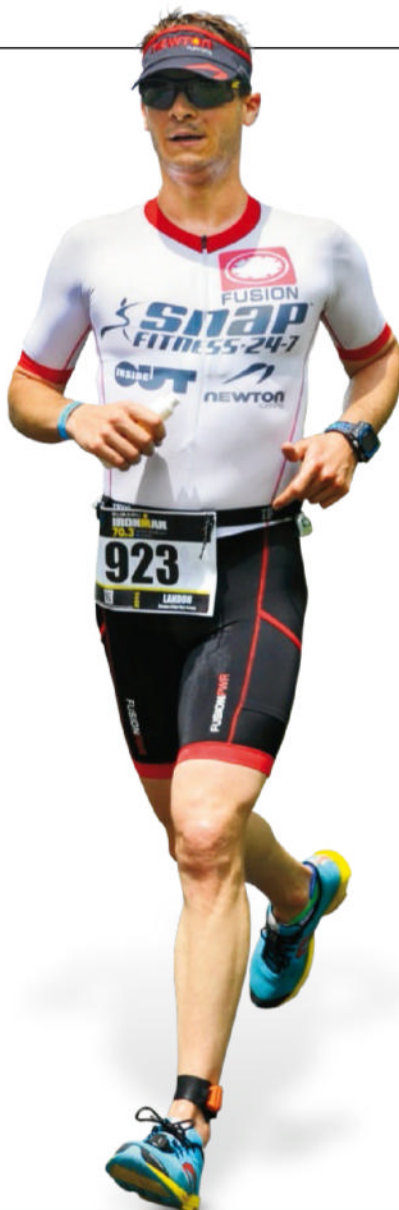
Landon Cassill

The running racer

THE COCA-COLA 600

is NASCAR's version of a marathon: a 600-mile race over 400 laps that takes nearly four hours to finish. Apparently, completing it wasn't a strenuous enough effort for Landon Cassill. On May 24 the 26-year-old from Fairfax, Iowa, finished 39th, then swapped his number 40 Chevy for a pair of sneakers and ran 13.92 miles from the Charlotte Motor Speedway to the NASCAR Hall of Fame in 1:41:49 (7:19 per mile average). "It's a mental challenge, just like in a race car," says Cassill of his long-distance runs. "We are endurance athletes."

Six-time Sprint Cup Series champ Jimmie Johnson, who has run marathons and triathlons, inspired Cassill's focus on fitness. After six months of running, biking and swimming in preparation for the Ironman 70.3 World Championships in Austria on Aug. 29, Cassill is feeling the benefits behind the wheel.



"There are so many conditions in the car stacked against you while you're trying to maintain focus," says Cassill. "In the car you need mental clarity to make split-second decisions, and in a workout you need it to fight off the pain."

During a race Cassill's heart rate resembles that of a marathoner, hovering between 70% and 90% of his maximum. He prepares for that stress by training six to seven days a week, sometimes in two sessions a day, while still logging nine to 12 hours a week behind the wheel of his car. Cassill's trainer, Jamey Yon, says he creates structured, detailed workouts based on biometric feedback for the 5' 7", 155-pound Cassill, who like most drivers is accustomed to monitoring the meters on the dashboard. "Instead of perceived effort, it's based on numbers like heart rate or power output," Yon says.

Cassill hopes to use the devices made to measure running performance to capture data during car races and quantify how fatigued his body is after driving. "You have to manage the car over the course of the race," says Cassill. "I visualize a workout like a race—you just have to manage your body." —Jamie Lisanti

EDGE

DRINK UP

Temperatures can exceed 120° inside a NASCAR cockpit, and Landon Cassill could lose up to 15 pounds during a three-hour race if he didn't drink anything. Cassill's trainer, Jamey Yon, offers tips on staying hydrated and how to tell if you're succeeding.

For more athlete training profiles and tips, go to SI.com/trainingwith

**Don't Chug**

Getting to the starting line with too much water in your system can be detrimental. Drink the standard eight to 10 glasses a day and make sure to lightly salt your food the day before a race to avoid cramping.

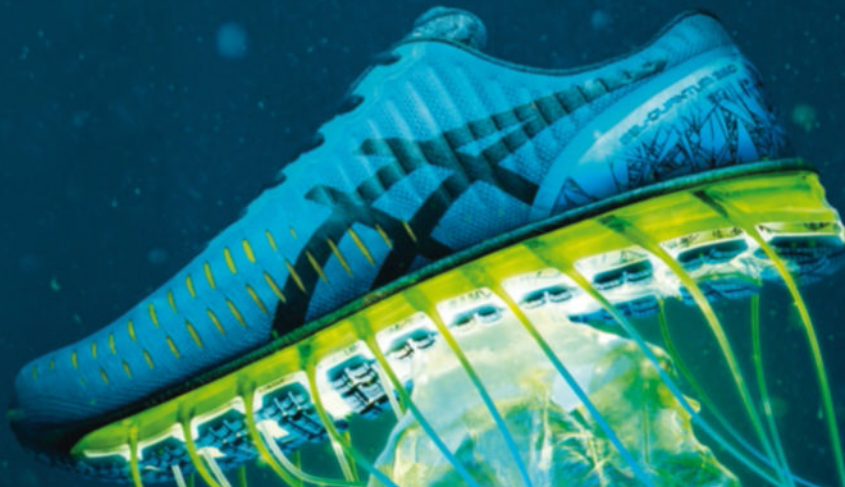
**Hop on the Scale**

Weighing yourself before and after a workout can be an indicator of how much fluid your body is losing during exercise. Every pound lost is equal to 16 ounces of fluid, Yon says.

**Check the Color**

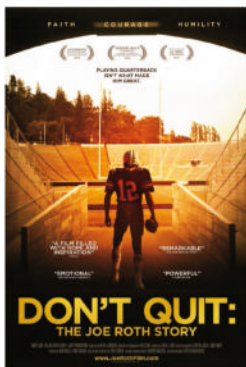
Monitoring your urine color is another method of measuring your body's hydration level. Anything dark is a sign of dehydration; light yellow is the gold standard.

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REVIEW

To an Athlete Dying Young

■ **JOE ROTH** was the quintessential golden boy, a quarterback with blond curls and a dazzling smile whose Cal Bears led the nation in total offense in 1975. A little over a year later he was dead, from melanoma, at age 21. *Don't Quit: The Joe Roth Story* is a chronicle of Roth's short but shimmering life, a *Brian's Song* for the 30 for 30 generation. The film features beautiful, washed-out archival footage that Instagram filters can only hope to replicate, and interviews with Roth's family, teammates, coaches and opponents, including Tony Dungy and Dick Vermeil. In November of his senior year, Roth was given 90 days to live, but he participated in postseason all-star games while undergoing chemo, never betraying his condition to teammates. "He wanted to be an ordinary Joe," his mother, Lena, says. "But he was different." —A.F.



Rashan Gary | Plainfield, N.J. | Football

Rashan, a 6' 5", 298-pound defensive end at Paramus Catholic High and the No. 1-ranked recruit in the nation, was named defensive MVP at The Opening football camp in Beaverton, Ore. The senior had 14 sacks, 55 tackles and 24 QB hurries in 2014 to help the Paladins earn a third straight trip to the nonpublic, Group 4 final. He is uncommitted.



Sophia Rivera | Brentwood, Mo. | Track and Field

Sophia, a senior at Brentwood High, earned silver in the shot put at youth worlds in Cali, Colombia, with a throw of 58' 10". She also competed in javelin to become the first athlete to take part in simultaneous field-event finals at an international meet. [She placed eighth.] In May, Sophia put the shot 51' 1¼" to set a state record and win the Class 2 title.



Peter Burns | Reading, Mass. | Baseball

Peter, a sophomore catcher at Austin Prep, led the New England Stampede with a .467 average and a .636 OBP at the Perfect Game 15-U wood bat nationals in Emerson, Ga. He was 10 for 10 in throwing out runners attempting to steal and was named all-tournament. Last season Peter hit .411 to lead the Cougars to the Division 3 North state final.

FACES IN THE CROWD

Edited by ALEXANDRA FENWICK



Coco Diemar | Naperville, Ill. | Triathlon

Coco, an incoming sixth-grader at Crone Middle School, won the youth nationals age-11 championship in West Chester, Ohio, by .28 of a second. She completed the 200-meter swim, 10K bike ride and 2K run in 33:57.75, clocking the fastest bike split. At cycling road nationals in June, Coco was fourth in the criterium and fifth in the time trial for ages 11-12.



Johnny Schulz | Delray Beach, Fla. | Boxing

Schulz, 46, earned his fourth Ringside World Championship title, beating Louis Tafuto of Warwick, N.Y., 3-0 in the 154-pound weight class of the 35-to-99 age group, in Independence, Mo. A healthcare recruiter and a boxing coach at StrikeGym in Coconut Creek, Schulz won a Florida Golden Gloves masters title in March in the 165-pound class.



Debra Brown | Bristol, Vt. | Horseshoes

Brown, 59, won the women's world horseshoe title in Topeka, Kans., with a 13-2 record and a ringer percentage of 77.87. She also received the National Horseshoe Pitchers Association's achievement award for her contribution to the sport in her state. Brown, who runs a day care center, is a 15-time Vermont and seven-time New England champ.

Nominate Now ▼

To submit a candidate for Faces in the Crowd, go to SI.com/faces. For more on outstanding amateur athletes, follow @SI_Faces on Twitter.



JUST MY TYPE

→ Interview by **DAN PATRICK**

DAN PATRICK: How are you treated in Japan?

RANDY JOHNSON: Like I'm Godzilla. [Laughs.]

DP: How long would it take for you to pitch again?

RJ: Well, if I hadn't ended my career in 2009 with a torn [left] rotator cuff. . . .

DP: What if you hadn't had 300 wins yet? Would you have contemplated coming back?

RJ: My last year in Arizona, in 2008, I was five or six wins away. If I had been 15 or 20 away, I probably would have considered retiring because I was 45 years old. I have thought about that scenario a few times. I do feel extremely blessed that I got my 300th win before I tore my rotator cuff. Had I torn it beforehand, I may have been at 298 or 299.

DP: When did you first realize you could intimidate hitters?

RJ: When I got a little bit of control and consistency. Prior to that, anything I was throwing had no control. Whether batters were intimidated or scared, I wasn't even thinking about that. I was more thinking about trying to throw strikes. Then when I started learning how to throw controlled strikes and understood how you could throw inside or under someone's chin, that became part of my sequence of pitches.



RANDY JOHNSON

THE BIG EASY

Once surly, the five-time Cy Young winner turned diplomat is making amends. After his Hall of Fame induction, he traveled to Japan on a goodwill tour on behalf of the Diamondbacks.

DP: I recently saw that the Foo Fighters and Dave Grohl did a cover of Rush's "Tom Sawyer," and I know you're a big Rush fan. The Diamondbacks even gave you a replica of the set Rush drummer Neil Peart uses.

RJ: Yes, it's his 30-year anniversary drum kit. I know Dave from my Seattle days. Once in 1990–91 I was with a good friend of mine, Kim Thayil, who is the guitar player for Soundgarden, and we went to a small club. It may have been one of Dave's first shows on the drums with Nirvana.

DP: Did you understand how big Nirvana was going to be at the time?

RJ: No, they were just part of the scene like everybody else. None of those bands were big outside Seattle at the time. It's like when I got there in '89 after being traded from Montreal and hearing the buzz about Starbucks. Who ever thought Starbucks would be where it is now?

DP: One day while you were pitching with the Diamondbacks, Mark Grace and Luis Gonzalez told me to go talk to you because you loved to talk to people on the day you were pitching. It didn't go well.

RJ: You know, Dan, I'm trying to track down some of the hitters I may have pissed off or some of the reporters from back then. [Laughs.] No hard feelings. That was just part of me being me. You know that saying, "Manny being Manny"? That was just RJ being RJ on game day. I'm definitely not like that now. □

GUEST SHOTS SAY WHAT?



I asked Texans quarterback and former

Patriot **Brian Hoyer** if J.J. Watt reminds him of any of his former teammates. "Tom Brady," Hoyer said. "Like Brady, he's obsessed with being perfect. Obsessed with his craft. There's similar desire there." . . .

Jane Rosenberg's unflattering



courtroom sketch of Brady during last

week's Deflategate hearing drew a lot of attention. "People found me on my personal email and just started writing me nasty comments," Rosenberg told me. "It's shocking that people would waste their time to do this." . . . I asked



Bears linebacker **Jared Allen** if he ever

wanted to punch one of his quarterbacks. "I've been fortunate enough to play with some cool quarterbacks," Allen said. "I don't have a problem with Jay [Cutler], but I know a lot of people seem to."

The Case for . . . No NFL in L.A.

BY LEE JENKINS

OH, NO, here they come, another busload of unwanted transplants with big dreams and limited talents to pollute our airways and hurt our eyes. Forgive us if we don't throw a pep rally or send a welcome basket or even hold the door. It's been 20 years since the NFL left Los Angeles, and look how we've suffered. The Lakers reeled off five NBA championships. USC football claimed two straight national titles. UCLA basketball reached three straight Final Fours. The Kings lifted the Stanley Cup twice, and the Ducks did it once. The Angels won the World Series. Lob City was born. Clayton Kershaw was drafted, as was Mike Trout. We subbed Magic Johnson for Frank McCourt, Steve Ballmer for Donald Sterling.

What did we miss—and we're asking honestly, not because we've suffered any concussions. We played fantasy football. We caught Manning and Brady on basic cable. We filled the bars on Sundays. We discovered, for reasons physical and emotional, that it was healthier to witness Raiders games from afar. The teams that weren't stupid enough to bail on L.A. reaped the benefits. The Dodgers lead Major League Baseball in attendance for the third year in a row, and the Angels rank fifth. The Clippers and the Kings were at 100% capacity last season, the Lakers and the Ducks at 98.3%. In a few Saturdays the Trojans and the Bruins will draw 140,000 fans to stadiums separated by



less than 15 miles. We heard you've been into deflated balls lately. Out here, we like our orbs inflated, all of them. And we don't apologize for that.

So now the race is on for the NFL, back to L.A., between the Rams, Raiders and Chargers. Representatives from those franchises converged on Chicago on Aug. 11 to present competing stadium proposals to fellow owners. The Rams intend to build in Inglewood, while the Raiders and the Chargers want to share a home in Carson. Only one project will be approved. There is more excitement for the Thursday turtle races at Brennan's Pub in Marina del Rey. Seriously, we're not talking about Pete Carroll leading the Seahawks south. We're talking about two more hours a week on the 405, tailgates

+ We know, we know, in most cities the NFL is king, and no option can rival the fullback dive. L.A. is not most cities.

in Carson and thousands of dollars in personal seat licenses to watch the Chargers mount their annual surge to 7–9. The USC spring game sounds better. The Long Beach Poly spring game sounds better.

We know, we know, in most cities the NFL is king, and no option can rival the fullback dive. But L.A. is not most cities. Transplants stick with their teams, and locals already support half a dozen superior squads. Of course the owners searching for estates in Bel Air don't mind. They'll build their shiny stadiums, sell their pricey sponsorships and watch their net worth rise. But after the buzz wears off—around the time of Nick Foles's eighth pick, let's say—they'll sit in their luxury boxes and gaze on row after row of empty seats. On second thought, that's not true. Opposing fans will hang around. It'll be an easy trip for them.

To be fair, the Raiders do have a following in Los Angeles, but they also have a following in Oakland and they still have to tarp the top deck of O.co Coliseum. At least the Raiders and Rams have won a Super Bowl. The Chargers haven't, coming close only once since the Spanos family bought the franchise in 1984. That was the same year Sterling shipped the Clippers from San Diego to L.A., the last team to move here. It took 27 years for the jokes to stop.

So unless you can help bring Kevin Durant to town next summer, do yourself a favor: Don't come. Because we're going to pick Pasadena over Carson, Song Girls over cheerleaders, bat flips over touchdown dances, purple-and-gold over Silver and Black, and we're going to do it every day of the week—and, yes, twice on Sunday. □

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**Sports
Illustrated**

STEADY ON

Martinez and the Cardinals' other hurlers have filled in nicely for the injured Wainwright: St. Louis has the best ERA (2.60) in the majors.

Photograph by
David E. Klutho
For Sports Illustrated

THE WALKING *Reo*

*THEY JUST KEEP COMING AND COMING—
GAME AFTER GAME, YEAR AFTER YEAR—
AND WHEN ONE FALLS, ANOTHER RISES TO
TAKE HIS PLACE. NO, THE CARDINALS ARE
NOT A ZOMBIE SWARM. BUT THEY ARE THE
MONSTERS OF A STACKED DIVISION—AND
THEY'RE COMING FOR YOU IN OCTOBER*

BY BEN REITER



B

BY NOW the rest of baseball can be forgiven for viewing the Cardinals as an unstoppable zombie horde, hell-bent on eating their brains the Right Way, in front of loyal crowds of the Best Fans in Brain-Eating.

Surely, this should have been the year the Cardinals' inexorable march slowed. They lost their longtime ace (Adam Wainwright, torn Achilles) and their top setup man (Jordan Walden, shoulder strain) in April and May, respectively, and have played much of the season without the sluggers who batted number 3 (Matt Holliday, strained quadriceps) and number 5 (Matt Adams, torn quadriceps) in their Opening Day lineup. Moreover, the franchise's reputation was damaged by the shocking and potentially distracting revelation in June that members of its front office were under federal investigation for hacking the internal database of the Houston Astros; the Cardinals fired their scouting director, Chris Correa, last month, and the investigation is ongoing.

And yet, St. Louis, with a five-game lead over the Pirates in the NL Central, is virtually assured of its fifth straight postseason appearance and its 12th in the last 16 years. With a majors-best record of 75–42, the Cardinals are on pace to become baseball's first 104-game winner since—well, since St. Louis won 105 in 2004. *Nom, nom, nom.*

Like any zombie army worth its putrefying limbs, the Cardinals have been able to continue their assault thanks in part to their unmatched depth. Even after their front line goes down, there's plenty more where that came from. Wainwright's



*LIKE ANY ZOMBIE ARMY, THE
CARDINALS HAVE CONTINUED
THEIR ASSAULT THANKS
TO THEIR UNMATCHED DEPTH.*

season-ending rupture, which occurred while he was batting on April 25, hit them hard. “When you look at these types of injuries, you have the pity party, it might last a day or two, but you ultimately know you’re going to have to play tomorrow,” says John Mozeliak, now in his eighth year as GM and 20th with the organization. St. Louis, though, has maintained its dominance by assiduously anticipating such losses, rather than scrambling to address them after they occur. “Bill DeWitt”—the team’s owner—“and I have always talked about understanding not just what you look like today, but where you need to be three to five years from now,” Mozeliak says.

DILIP VISHWANATH/GETTY IMAGES



ing in SI's *FACES IN THE CROWD* as a 13-year-old in 2005, and being the Texas high schooler whom the Angels selected one slot before they picked Mike Trout in the first round of the 2009 draft. His first few seasons in the minors were unpromising, ruined by a series of injuries, and he seemed destined to become little more than the answer to a trivia question. And yet, says Mozeliak, "we really needed him to be in that deal to do the deal," even if he was only seventh on his organization's outfield depth chart entering last spring.

It turned out that even though the 24-year-old Grichuk stands 6' 1" and weighs 195 pounds—not exactly a Ruthian build—he swings with the type of power that sends what at first appears to be a pop-up clanging into the seats eight rows back. "The best thing I can tell you is a visiting hitting coach in spring training said the last time he saw a ball come off the bat like that was with Mark McGwire," says Cardinals hitting coach

John Mabry. Adds Mozeliak, "He almost reminds me of Bam-Bam. You remember the Flintstones?"

This season, as he was pressed into regular duty with Holliday in and out of the lineup, the average exit velocity of Grichuk's batted balls, according to Stat-Cast, is 93.45 miles per hour—the fourth fastest in the majors, right below Miguel Cabrera's and a tick above Trout's, who ranks fifth. If Grichuk has not yet gained much support as a potential NL Rookie of the Year in a loaded class, he should. Though he has made at least 150 fewer plate appearances than front-runners Kris Bryant and Joc Pederson, he already has

15 home runs (Pederson has 23, Bryant 16), and he leads all rookies with an .894 OPS. Grichuk, for one, doesn't seem too excited about his feats of strength: "I enjoy working out, getting after it," he says with a shrug.

IT IS, of course, one thing to be strong, and another to be an elite major league hitter. Grichuk has also turned in a batting average (.284) and an on-base percentage (.333) higher than any he has produced since A ball. One explanation for Grichuk's sudden rise is, yes, the Cardinal Way, the organizational philosophy whose mention induces cynical cringes among



ARCH SUPPORT

Grichuk (above) and Jason Heyward (top left) key a lineup that scores enough for St. Louis's dominant staff.

Even without Wainwright, the Cardinals' staff boasts an ERA, 2.60, that would be the best of any club's since 1972. That is largely due to a league-best bullpen and the well-balanced rotation Mozeliak assembled behind Wainwright—which features veterans John Lackey and Lance Lynn as well as youngsters Carlos Martinez and Michael Wacha—but also to a bit of luck that only the Cardinals seem to consistently experience. Jaime Garcia, the 29-year-old sinkerballer, underwent his second shoulder surgery in as many years last summer, and Mozeliak admits, "We were not thinking he was going to contribute to this club at all." Through 11 starts, though, Garcia, who returned to the rotation in May, has a 1.57 ERA.

IT WAS harder still to see how the Cardinals' lineup would continue to function once its heart was cut out, but the club had planned for that possibility, too. Back in November 2013, St. Louis traded its 2011 World Series hero—third baseman David Freese—and reliever Fernando Salas to the Angels for a pair of outfielders, Peter Bourjos and Randal Grichuk. At the time, Grichuk was best known for two things: appear-

opponents. The Cardinals want their prospects to rise to the majors not by a series of disjointed stops in Palm Beach and Springfield and Memphis, but via a seamless progression in which the same lessons are being taught at each level. “Even down to the point of knowing a lot of our plays defensively and offensively,” says Mike Matheny, the big league club’s manager.

Once he reached St. Louis, Grichuk’s education did not end. “I feel like in the minor leagues I didn’t really know how pitchers were trying to pitch to me,” he says. “I might have been up there just hunting a pitch and just going with it. Up here, with all the veteran leadership we have, you can go up and ask them anything. What is a pitcher trying to do to you? Is he coming in? Is he showing you in to go away? How is he setting you up?”

“The big guy, I would say, who has helped me in all aspects is Jon Jay.”

Jay is a 30-year-old outfielder whose ongoing employment with the Cardinals is currently being threatened, partially by the fact that he is batting .223 and partially because he is on the 15-day disabled list with a wrist injury—but mostly due to the emergence of Grichuk, the player he has taken under his wing. “Every day,” says Matheny, “during the game, mentioning something to him. I mean, constantly. This is a guy that could potentially get in the way of [Jay’s] future. But the reason this has been successful is these guys have all realized, just do the right thing. When I see it, when one of the staff members sees it, we go out of our way to say, What you’re doing is right. You’ve been on the DL for 15 days already, but you’re making our team better.”

For the Cardinals, a diligent assembling of consistent depth is only half the battle. The rest of their success lies in an ingrained organizational culture—even if outsiders are sick of hearing about it—that can, among other things, lead incumbent veterans to nurture their successors, even if the future benefits to themselves are nebulous.

While this year’s Cardinals seem built, against the odds, to be a superteam, Grichuk says that the chain down to the minors remains unbroken—which is a good thing, as Grichuk himself landed on the 15-day DL with a strained elbow on Monday. “I feel like there are definitely guys down there that are chomping at the bit to get up here.”

Just what the rest of baseball needs: more chomping Cardinals. □

THE COLE *Truth*

*KEEPING PACE IN THE NL
CENTRAL ISN'T EASY, BUT THE
PIRATES ARE PUSHING THE
CARDINALS HARD WITH A NEW-
AGE APPROACH IN THE DUGOUT
AND AN OLD-SCHOOL ACE AT
THE TOP OF THE ROTATION*

BY ALBERT CHEN

Photograph by
David E. Klutho
For Sports Illustrated

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THERE'S AN easy way to tap into the psyche of the Pirates: Find out what Clint Hurdle is reading. Last winter, leading up to his fifth season as the team's manager, Hurdle became a John Wooden completist. He read every book on the UCLA great, "mining for wisdom on achieving sustained success." Earlier this season, as his motley crew of prospects and reclamation projects and international imports sputtered to an uneven start, Hurdle could be seen on flights with a dog-eared copy of *The Boys in the Boat*, the tale of a ragtag U.S. crew team that won gold at the '36 Olympics.

Last Friday at Citi Field, as his surging Pirates—the best team in baseball since mid-May—opened up a three-game series with the Mets, the skipper leaned back in his chair as he revealed the title he'd gotten his hands on during his team's trip to St. Louis last week. "*The Matheny Manifesto*," he said with a toothy, wry smile—Cardinals manager Mike Matheny's new autobiography. "Figure now's the perfect time to crack it open."

As their manager's reading list may suggest, the Pirates are still looking up at St. Louis in the NL Central: After sweeping the Mets, Pittsburgh had the second-best record in the National League—but still trailed the Cardinals by five games. But with a six-game lead in the wild-card standings, a third straight postseason appearance is well within reach, and the franchise's win total since the start of the 2013 season is higher than every team but that of the Cardinals and the Dodgers. And those teams' budgets over the last three years dwarf the minuscule expenditures of the Pirates, whose 2015 Opening Day payroll ranked 25th out of 30.

This is not your typical organization, and that is clear the moment you step inside the home clubhouse at PNC Park. Players glide in on electric-powered scooters. ("It's become a thing here," says star centerfielder Andrew McCutchen. "The walk to the parking lot is really long—and over 81 games it adds up!") In the hours before game time, players walk around in black compression shirts affixed with blinking fitness-monitoring devices over their chest, like cyborg warriors in a *Terminator* movie. Evidence of the organization's analytics-driven (and top secret) philosophies are omnipresent, and nowhere is the spirit of innovation and creativity more apparent than in the area of run prevention. There is the devotion to defensive shifts—fielders are strategically de-

CENTRAL COMMAND

played on the field with NASA-like precision—but also this: The Pirates, a team powered by baseball's second-best pitching staff, have become a Lourdes for pitchers, having miraculously saved the careers of several broken starters in recent seasons: Francisco Liriano, A.J. Burnett, Vance Worley, Edinson Volquez.

The pitcher who best epitomizes the Pirates' ethos is not a reclamation project, however. He is a former No. 1 overall pick with a 100-mph fastball, a gunslinger whom the 38-year-old Burnett simply calls "God." He is the reason why Pittsburgh is the team no one should want to face come October.

I COULDN'T IMAGINE playing here, in New York, because of all the b.s.," Gerrit Cole was saying last Saturday afternoon, sitting in the visitor's dugout at Citi Field. The 24-year-old ace of the Pirates was talking about baseball's hype machine, impossible expectations and the pressures of being a phenom in today's game. Cole once faced those impossible expectations himself, and he has fulfilled the prophecies: In his second full season, the righthander is tied for the major league lead in wins (14) and has the sixth-best ERA (2.48) in the NL, with 149 strikeouts in 148⅓ innings pitched.

"The pressure to perform so early is huge," says Cole, who was called up to the majors at age 22 three summers ago, in the middle of a playoff race in Pittsburgh. "There's not a lot of opportunities for players to come up in this game and perform without pressure. There's no time anymore for a guy to learn how to pitch."

Baseball's hype machine has whirled around Cole since he was in high school. He was picked by the Yankees in the first round in 2008, but he turned New York down, believing he needed more seasoning; he was the first high school pitcher selected in the first round in seven years to go to college instead. What made the decision even more startling was that he had grown up in California as a Yankees fan. When he was 11 he went to the 2001 World Series and sat in the front row for Games 6 and 7 in Bank One Ballpark in Phoenix; New Jersey's *Star Ledger* published a photo of Cole holding a sign that read YANKEES FAN TODAY, TOMORROW, FOREVER. But Cole and his family stuck with the plan. Though he had hit 101 on the radar gun his senior year, he went to college and over the next three years went 21–20 at UCLA before the Pirates made him the No. 1 pick in 2011.

In the minors, Cole's strikeout totals were surprisingly pedestrian for a pitcher whose fastball



THE BIG BUCS

McCutchen (above) is making a case for his second MVP, while Hurdle (below) has created the clubhouse aura of a perennial contender.



had been compared with Stephen Strasburg's. Some took the low whiff rate (he struck out just 21.9% of hitters in 222 innings) as an indicator that Cole might not be as good as advertised. "That stuff can get into your head," he says. "Looking back, I'm just glad I didn't give a s--- about it. I'm trying to put the ball on the ground, and it's working for me, so I'm not going to change."

Cole is 6' 4", 230 pounds, a prototypical power pitcher's build, with long brown hair, a solid jaw and a neck as thick as an oak. He glares down from the mound holding his glove in front of his face before he starts his delivery, much like the man whom he listed, in the UCLA media guide, as one of his heroes: Roger Clemens. The power of Cole's fastball comes from his torque; his belt buckle is still nearly facing home plate when his shoulders twist to face third base—a powerfully efficient motion, one that relies on core strength rather than arm strength. It also lessens the kinetic toll on the arm as Cole unleashes five different pitches—four-seamer, sinker, slider, curveball and changeup—at any point in the count. "He's already one of the three best pitchers I've ever caught," says backstop Francisco Cervelli, a longtime Yankee who has handled the likes of CC Sabathia, Mariano Rivera and Andy Pettitte. "He pitches like he's on fire."

Nurtured by an organization that schools all its pitchers, from rookie ball to the majors, to pitch to contact, he avoids the temptation, with his blowtorch fastball, to strike out every hitter. "God gave him talent, but he also listened," says Pirates pitching coach Ray Searage. "Our core values are: First-pitch strikes. Make something happen in three pitches or less. Control the running game. Keep the three-ball counts to a minimum.

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Pitch in, which opens up your sinker, so that can go in and can go away. Since the day he got here, he's been all in on all of those."

Cole's slider usage and strikeout rate (now nine per nine innings) are up this year, but so is his groundball rate (a career high 50.4%), following the M.O. of a staff that has led the league in groundball percentage the last three years. "Just pound the zone with sinkers—that's their deal," Cardinals hitting coach John Mabry says of a staff that includes Liriano (52.6 groundball percentage), Burnett (53.2) and Charlie Morton (58.3). "It's a pretty good theory."

While the team was in St. Louis last week, a clubbie asked Cole to sign a ball for a fan. "He's like, it's Whitey Herzog who wants one. I'm like, he wants a ball for me? I had to meet him. Amazing gentleman. Cussed up a storm, too."

Cole will not allow the growing attention to get to him, however—he never has. And he knows that other young pitchers have it tougher. The following weekend, while the Pirates were in New York, Cole gestured toward the opposite dugout. "That rotation, for instance, is just hyped beyond belief—I mean, the guys here have no room for error," he said of the Mets' pitchers. "I was talking to some of the guys in the clubhouse today [about Matt Harvey]. And these guys are like, Oh, yeah, Harvey, he's been lucky the last few starts. I look at his numbers, and I'm like, Geez Louise, the guy is coming off freaking Tommy John, he just had his elbow cut into!"

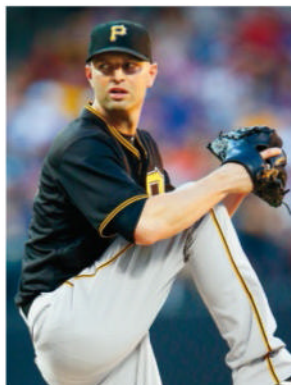
"You look at Matz"—Mets rookie Steven Matz, who made a brief splash earlier this season but is now on the DL with a partial tear of his left lat muscle—"he comes in for his major league debut and he pulls his lat in his first game. I have no idea how it was handled, but I have to believe that the guy, after his major league debut, he's worried about pitching the next game and he pushes through again, and two starts into his career he's on the shelf."

The young pitcher's point is this: "Becoming a great pitcher in this league, it's easy to lose sight of it in this day and age, but I know it doesn't happen overnight. I've got nothing figured out."



OFF THE HEAP

Behind Cole, vets like Liriano (left) and J.A. Happ (right) have stabilized the Pirates' rotation.



FORMER YANKEE CERVELLI CALLS COLE, "ONE OF THE THREE BEST PITCHERS I'VE EVER CAUGHT."

SATURDAY-NIGHT BLOCK PARTY, reads the banner above the stage outside PNC Park on a recent August afternoon—this summer, on nights the Pirates are in town, this patch of Pittsburgh is host to the biggest bash in the city. This evening fans clutching Primanti Brothers hoagies and plastic cups of beer pack Federal Street. They climb onto the massive bronze statues along the street, for selfies with Willie Stargell and Roberto Clemente. On a plaza along the Allegheny River, a marching band plays and people spin and dance as they walk over the great yellow iron bridge that spans the water.

Pittsburgh is a baseball town again.

It happened suddenly: Three years ago, when the losing stretched into a third decade, the Pirates struggled to draw crowds to their jewel of a ballpark. Now attendance at PNC is up for a third straight season, to 30,376, and after two straight early October exits, expectations from the faithful are as high as they are for the beloved Steelers. As they should be: This Pirates team, on pace for the franchise's highest win total (97) since 1991, is by far the best of the Hurdle era. It boasts one of the most dynamic

outfields in the game, with McCutchen, Starling Marte and Gregory Polanco; a lockdown bullpen that through Sunday had won 16 consecutive decisions, the most since 1909; and a rotation fronted by a young ace who may be capable of Bumgarnerian feats this October.

"This is what it's all about," Hurdle said last week, as his team began a brutal 20-game stretch with no off-days. After that comes the cauldron of September, with six more games against St. Louis. "It's going to be fierce, it's going to be fun," Hurdle says, with the bravado of a man who likes his chances, and he pounds the table with a grin and a glint in his eye, as if to say: Bring on the Cardinals. Bring on September.

Bring it all on.

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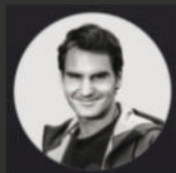
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THE TIME OF



DAY

BY ALAN
SHIPNUCK

Photographs by
Robert Beck
For Sports Illustrated

IN STYLE

*Day overpowered
Whistling Straits
while setting
a major-
championship
scoring record.*

+ GOLF

SO CLOSE SO OFTEN AT A MAJOR, **JASON DAY** FINALLY BROKE THROUGH AT THE PGA, FEARLESSLY VANQUISHING THE TOP PLAYER IN THE GAME AND FURTHER PUTTING HIS DARK PERIOD AS A TROUBLED YOUTH IN AUSTRALIA BEHIND HIM

SEAN FOLEY lay on a leather couch in the Whistling Straits clubhouse last Saturday night, telling a story that illustrates just how much Jordan Spieth has gotten into the heads of his peers. Foley, a swing coach to the stars, was on the practice putting green during the wind delay at last month's British Open when Spieth stroked a midrange putt. The ball stopped a couple of inches from the cup, but then a hard gust blew it in. Throwing up his arms in mock disgust, Sergio García shouted, "Even when you miss it, you make it!"

This is what poor Jason Day had to overcome last week at the 97th PGA Championship in Kohler, Wis. Day, 27, had been become golf's star-crossed kid, an awesome talent with a disconcerting inability to get it done at major championships. That he had contended until the bitter end at Augusta National (twice), the Old Course, Merion and Chambers Bay was testament to his sublime combination of power and touch, but something was holding Day back; just last month at the British Open he had an 18-foot downhill putt on the 72nd hole to join the playoff but somehow left it short. He walked off in a haze of what he called "disbelief" and "shock."

But Day has a flinty resilience that comes from a tough upbringing in Australia. After his father died when he was 12, his mother sent him to a golf academy far from the streets where he was regularly getting drunk and causing trouble. So the week after the heartbreak at St. Andrews, Day picked himself up and rallied to win the Canadian Open, and at Whistling Straits he

played some of the best golf of his life across the first three days. Late on Saturday it looked as if Day might have to hold off only lurkers like Matt Jones, Branden Grace and Anirban Lahiri to get his breakthrough. Then Spieth mounted the kind of charge that has already become a trademark.

After a birdie at the 1st, his round had stalled with nine consecutive pars, so on the par-5 11th, Spieth lashed a monster drive. Explaining his technique, he said, "I was pissed so I swung really hard"; after a birdie there, "the holes started looking bigger." Just like that Spieth turned ravenous, pouring in five more birdies for a back-nine 30 that propelled him from irrelevancy to within two shots of the lead and into the final group, alongside Day. Spieth, who turned 22 in July, lacks Tiger Woods's seething intensity and raw strength, but his relentless drive and hyperefficiency have made him nearly as feared already. To have to fend off Spieth seemed like just another bad beat for Day, but this test of his fortitude turned out to be exactly what he needed. "I'm going to give him a fight," Day said following the third round, with some steel in his voice.

On Sunday, Day was so intimidated he birdied four of the first seven holes. That left Spieth four back, and though he fought hard, Day simply refused to let him apply any pressure. The signature moment of this overpowering victory came on the 11th hole. Spieth had birdied the 10th to trim the deficit to three, and it felt like the moment when Day would allow the fates to conspire against him, as they always have. Instead, he mashed a 382-yard drive into the skinniest part of the fairway. When he got to his ball in the right rough, Spieth was thunderstruck to discover he was 80 yards back. "You've got to be kidding me," he yelled down the fairway at the 6-foot, 195-pound Day, who responded by flexing one of his brawny biceps. Day needed only a wedge for his second shot, securing a birdie that restored his lead to four strokes. He roared home with a 67, pushing his four-round total to 20 under, a scoring record for the major championships. Whistling Straits may have been softened a bit by rain, but disaster still lurked on every swing; Day was simply that good. "We play a lot of golf together, and that's the best I've ever seen him play," said Spieth, whose 17-under total had previously been bettered only by Woods and Bob May since the PGA Championship went to stroke play in 1958.

Day called the victory "one of the best moments of my life," but the tears that poured out on the final hole were not joy, exactly.




**SPIETH
IMPEDIMENT**
*Day matched
Spieth's absurd
birdie out of the
sand at the 16th on
Sunday, when the
rivals also had their
lighter moments.*



DAY'S FATHER, Alvin, was a native of Australia, while his mother, Denning, hails from the Philippines. She describes herself as a "mail bride"—she had a long correspondence with Alvin but did not meet him until he flew to her homeland for their wedding. Jason was born in Beaudesert, on Australia's Gold Coast. His parents worked at a nearby port, Denning as a clerk and her husband manning the scales. "There was a big difference between the haves and the have-nots," she says. "We were on the bottom of the have-nots."

Jason started playing golf at age six. His father pushed him hard to excel, which created only part of the strain in their relationship; Jason says Alvin was an alcoholic. After he died of stomach cancer, the family fractured. Kim, one of Jason's two older sisters, ran away from home and lived on the streets for more than a year before returning, while for Jason alcohol became an escape. "He was a lost soul," Denning says.

Believing that golf was her son's only road to salvation, Denning sold their house to pull together enough money to send Jason to board at Kooralbyn International School, a seven-hour drive from home. Colin Swatton was the golf coach there, and the two got off to a rocky start. On their first afternoon together Swatton instructed Day to work on his short game. "I told him to f--- off," says Day. "I was still a punk." He stormed off and played a few holes before having a moment of clarity. "I was out there thinking, Man, my family is sacrificing so much for me to come here. So I went back and apologized."



DAY WAS SIMPLY THAT GOOD. “WE PLAY A LOT OF GOLF TOGETHER,” SAID SPIETH, “AND THAT’S THE BEST I’VE EVER SEEN HIM PLAY.”

“I don’t think we’ve had a cross word since,” says Swatton, 46, who now serves as a caddie, coach and father figure for Day. “From that day forward Jason outworked every other kid at the academy.” Reading a biography about Woods helped Day focus his ambition; just as a young Tiger had done with Jack Nicklaus, Day taped above his bed a time line of his hero’s accomplishments.

After a successful amateur career Day turned pro in 2006, at 18, and moved to Orlando. With Swatton on the bag, he played well enough at Q school to earn status on the Nationwide tour for ’07. He won the 11th start of his rookie year, becoming the youngest champion in the history of that tour. Afterward, Day raised eyebrows, and a few hackles, by declaring his intent to unseat Woods at the top of the World Ranking.

Two days after the Nationwide victory he had his first date with Ellie Harvey, who was working as a waitress at a pub that Swatton frequented. They dined at Applebee’s, with Swatton, ever the loyal wingman, tagging along. After dinner Day sent him home so he could squire Ellie to the movies, and six months later she moved in with him. “Things moved really fast,” Ellie says, “but that’s kind of the story of his life. He had to grow up really fast, so at an early age he knew what he wanted.”

In 2009 they were married in a barn near her hometown of Lucas, Ohio (pop. 602). While most Tour pros are clustered in the Sun Belt, the Days live in Columbus to be near Ellie’s large, close-knit family. In ’12 their son was born—Dash, named for the rambunctious kid

in *The Incredibles*. “Through Ellie and her family, Jason has found the stability he never knew growing up,” says Swatton.

It has not been as easy for Day to find his place between the ropes. Even as he began popping up on major-championship leader boards, he still had only one win, at the 2010 Byron Nelson Classic. His brash comments about being No. 1 were often brought up by the media as a kind of taunt about his underachievement. It took a tragedy to push Day to a different level. In November ’13, Typhoon Haiyan slammed into the Philippines. Day was in Australia, relaxing with his mom and two sisters



and gearing up for the World Cup, in which he was to play for his home country alongside his good mate Adam Scott. Days went by without any contact with Denning’s family until her brother was able to travel to check on the missing relatives. “They were gone,” says Denning. “Everything was gone.” Her mother and another brother perished in the storm, along with six cousins, among the death toll that exceeded 6,000.

Day was devastated for his mom, but Denning is as tough as Tida Woods—she insisted he compete in the World Cup to honor their lost family, saying, “Go win the tournament. We will cry afterward.” Her son played the most inspired golf of his life, joining with Scott to win the team title and holding off his countryman for individual honors. “It was incredibly emotional,” Day says. “I found something deep inside myself.”

Even after he won the 2014 WGC-Accenture Match Play Championship and this year’s Farmers Insurance Open, Day has continued to absorb hard

lessons. At this year's U.S. Open he was felled by a bout of vertigo caused by an ear infection, but he bravely played on. Day shared the lead after 54 holes and tied for ninth. "I learned a lot about how far I could really push myself mentally and physically," he says. "It's just a matter of how much do you want it. And I really want it. I mean, I'm willing to put my body on the line just to get a taste of that greatness." He even took some positives from the British Open, saying it was the most calm he had ever felt coming down the stretch of a big tournament. "Unfortunately," Day said on the eve of the PGA, "some people make it look easier than others. Some people get there quicker than others. We're humans. We're not machines out there. It's very easy to make poor choices and have bad swings every now and then. But we were so blessed with Tiger and Rory [McIlroy] and Jordan, just recently, that winning looks so easy."

SPIETH'S FINISH at the PGA elevated him to No. 1 in the World Ranking, but even before the tournament began he was already acting like the sport's alpha male. Phil Mickelson has made it a tradition to organize money games on Tuesdays at the majors, and last week he enlisted Rickie Fowler to take on Spieth and his close friend Justin Thomas, a Tour rookie. Spieth woofed publicly that he was going to trot out his U.S. Open trophy, the one thing Mickelson can't buy with his many millions.

"When I heard that, I absolutely loved it because it's the kind of crap I would pull," Mickelson says. Of course, Spieth left the trophy at home, but it was the subject of much trash talk. Spieth's team was 1 up heading to the 18th hole, where he hit a toe-hook off the tee into a horrendous lie on the edge of a fairway bunker. With one foot in the sand, Spieth summoned a miracle shot to within eight feet of the cup. Fowler poured in a 40-footer for birdie, but Spieth gutted his putt to win the match and ensure a few crisp Benjamins would change hands. "I don't want to say that birdie was complete bulls---, but it really was," says Mickelson.

Spieth produced a similar highlight on Sunday—a bunker shot on 16 that prompted Day to say, "It baffles me the stuff that he can prove



"UNFORTUNATELY SOME PEOPLE MAKE IT LOOK EASIER THAN OTHERS," DAY SAID. "SOME PEOPLE GET THERE QUICKER THAN OTHERS. **WE'RE HUMANS. WE'RE NOT MACHINES OUT THERE.**"

CLASS. MATE

When it was over, Day and Spieth embraced, Swatton (with flagstick) and Michael Greller went to shake hands, and Dash dashed for Dad.

out there"—but in the end Spieth simply didn't have the firepower to keep up. Day is now third in the World Ranking and along with Spieth and the 26-year-old McIlroy makes up a tele-genic, cross-cultural and immensely appealing neo-Big Three. Reaching No. 1 remains the goal, and Day is willing to pay the price: He has eliminated sugar and alcohol from his diet, and he hits the gym with a vengeance six days a week.

Ellie is due in November with the couple's second child, and after the baby arrives, the Days will continue to travel the Tour as happy vagabonds in a tricked-out motor coach. Dash is a little ham, and he stole the show during the awards ceremony, but at one point while in his father's arms he pleaded, "Can we go home now?" He was too young to realize that after a long, hard journey, his dad is finally where he is supposed to be. □

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(NFL)

THE MATHLET

Why would a mathematician
delay his Ph.D. to be an offensive
lineman for the Ravens? **John Ursch**
chalks it up to the incalculable thrill
he gets from hitting people

+ BY EMILY KAPLAN

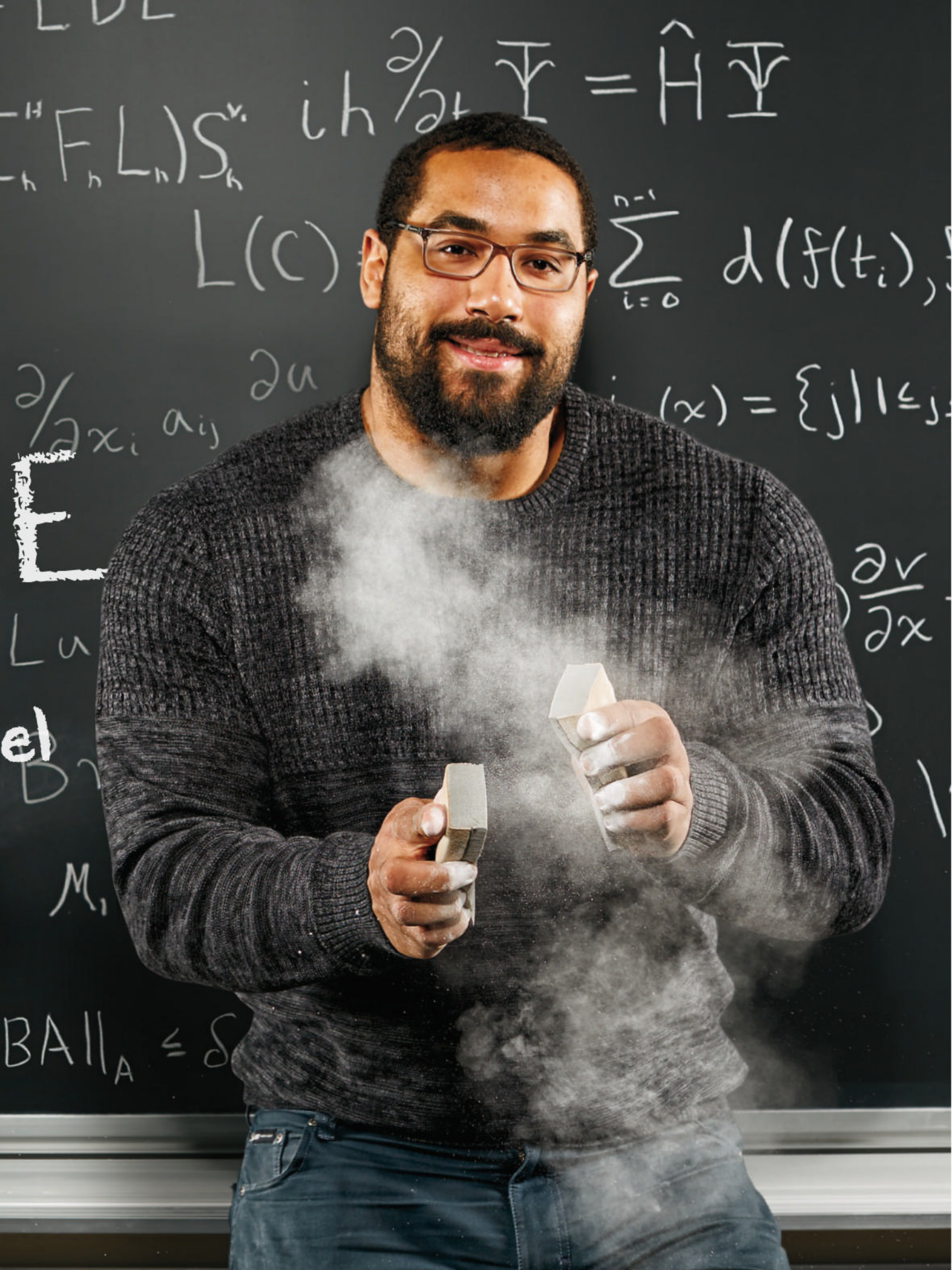
(Photographs by
STEVE BOYLE for Sports Illustrated)

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DAY IN State College, Pa., with the Ravens' second-year right guard, John Urschel, begins normally enough: pulled pork sandwiches, a stroll on his old college campus and, O.K., a game of chess. Then the afternoon takes a turn. "Wanna meet my buddy?" Urschel asks. "He gets out of class at four."

Here is the first indication that the 24-year-old Urschel is no typical NFL player. While his peers flash their plump bank accounts by purchasing Escalades or Bentleys—or

sometimes both—the 6' 3", 313-pound Urschel climbs into a used Nissan Versa hatchback, his sole rookie splurge. He drives six miles down winding roads and pulls into a development crammed with cul-de-sacs. He walks into a nondescript colonial, slides off his size 16 Nikes and is greeted by, well, not your typical entourage: Ludmil Zikatanov, a 52-year-old Penn State math professor, and his wife, Albena.

"John!" the petite woman proclaims in a thick Bulgarian accent before slipping to the pantry to prepare plates of figs and babka.

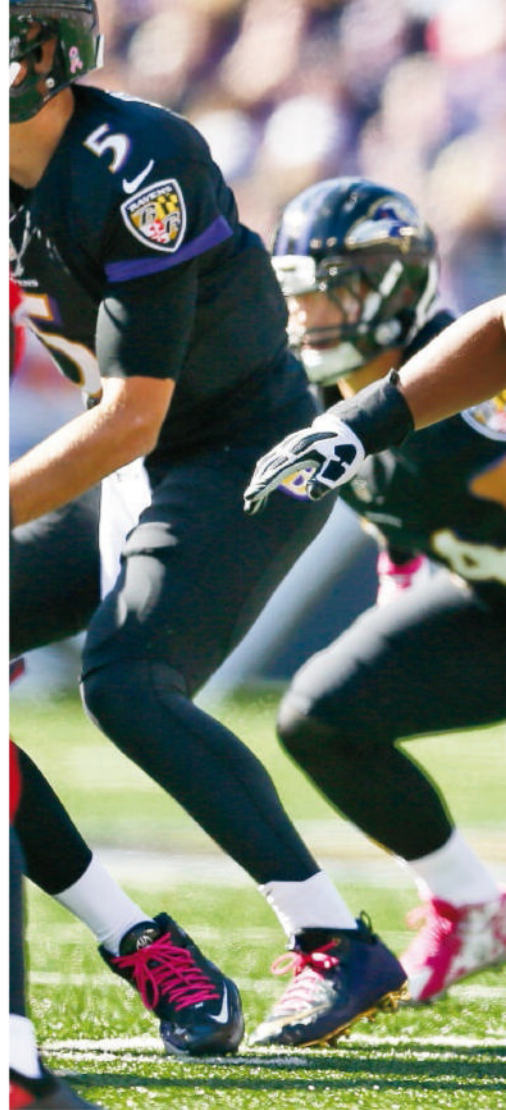
"Come in, come in," the professor says, though Urschel has already moved toward the kitchen, where he will set his laptop down and help himself to the espresso machine.

For the next three hours the man tasked with protecting Joe Flacco from the nastiest defenses of the rough-and-tumble AFC North will sit at this table and discuss . . . complex mathematical models.

I **THINK WE** all know what John does outside of football is special," says Ravens offensive line coach Juan Castillo. "But none of us really understand how special."

Two months after the Ravens lost to the Patriots in an AFC divisional playoff game—in which Urschel neutralized nosetackle Vince Wilfork and cleared paths for Justin Forsett to gain 129 yards—the *Journal of Computational Mechanics* published a paper by Urschel, a breezy 16-page read titled "A Cascadic Multigrid Algorithm for Computing the Fiedler Vector of Graph Laplacians." It was his fourth published research paper, if you discount his handful of posts on Derek Jeter's website The Players' Tribune.

At first glance Urschel's interests don't appear to intersect with those



"THE WAY WE SEE IT," SAYS YANDA, "THE KID LOVES TO HIT PEOPLE, AND THE KID LOVES MATH. AS LONG AS HE CAN PRODUCE ON THE FIELD, WHAT THE HECK?"



of the NFL, which is currently concerned about head injuries, among other pressing issues. Urschel's agent has warned him against speaking too much about math, on the assumption that some teams might assume the lineman has other career possibilities and might hesitate to sign him to a second contract. (One rival GM calls this idea "preposterous.") On the other hand, some professors must be wondering why a promising mathematician with a master's degree is delaying his Ph.D. to bulk up and play a violent sport.

Urschel, who says he lived on less than \$25,000 last year, despite earning an average salary of \$591,000 from his four-year deal with the Ravens, doesn't feel compelled to explain his dueling disciplines. Why should he be penalized for being successful in two fields?

"The way we see it," says Ravens veteran lineman Marshal Yanda, "is the kid

BIG SURPRISE

Expected to be little more than a practice player in 2014, Urschel outworked his rivals and started five games for Baltimore, including two in the playoffs.

team at his middle school couldn't find a helmet large enough for his head. He picked up the sport in high school, pleasing his father, a onetime linebacker at the University of Alberta.

John loved the mental discipline of football, but he enjoyed the physicality just as much. As a senior at Canisius High he was an all-state defensive tackle and was offered a spot on every Ivy League roster. Penn State gave him his only Division I opportunity. An inherent competitor, he became enamored of Joe Paterno's ideal of the student-athlete—best in the classroom, best on the field—and chose Happy Valley.

But there, too, Urschel frustrated school administrators. He told his athletic advisers he wanted to take math courses. Lengthy arguments ensued. "They would say, 'John, that's a terrible idea; that class is too hard,'" he says. "They'd say, 'Why don't you sign up for the Life and Thoughts of Martin Luther King? Or a communications course? The

loves to hit people, and the kid loves math. As long as he can produce on the field, what the heck?"

IT'S NOT that the school system failed Urschel but rather that teachers didn't know what to do with him. This was first apparent in suburban Buffalo, where an elementary school teacher told Venita Parker that her seven-year-old son might have processing problems. He was quiet but didn't seem to be paying attention. Perhaps he should repeat first grade. Parker, an attorney with a master's degree in biomedical science, and John Urschel Sr., a retired thoracic surgeon, disagreed. Young John took an intelligence test. The results were astounding.

The school called an audible. Perhaps John should skip a grade.

His parents placed him in a different school instead, but still, John was rarely engaged. In math class he would doodle, sleep, daydream, read Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*—and ace every test. His parents challenged him to beat them at chess (he began doing so at 10), gave him Rubik's Cubes (solved in less than 60 seconds) and, in eighth grade, had him audit a calculus course for business majors at the University of Buffalo. By that point John had grown to a beefy 6 feet, so it was not too surprising when college students asked him for pointers.

He also took piano and viola lessons and played soccer and lacrosse. He wanted to play football as well, but he was too big for Pop Warner, and the

transition from high school to college is difficult. [Find out] what you're into.' ” Urschel wonders how many student-athletes have had their serious interests doused by risk-averse counselors. Not he. Stubborn, at times feisty, he knew what he was into.

By the summer after his freshman year Urschel was in 400-level math courses, an 18-year-old among master's and Ph.D. students. For “fun nighttime reading,” he says, he took along a math textbook to the 2011 Outback Bowl despite a scolding from teammate Devon Still, who protested, “Dude, it's a vacation.”

Inevitably Urschel adopted the role of Nittany Lions tutor. Teammates regularly scheduled appointments at his off-campus apartment. “I can't tell you how many grades he saved,” says guard Miles Dieffenbach. The same way the team saved him from a narrower college experience.

“I'm grateful for football,” Urschel says. “It forced me to be well-rounded. It forced me to go out on a Friday night and not just stay hunched in my room poring over problems.”

URSCHEL, UNSURPRISINGLY, is popular on the career-day and math-club circuits. A cynic might see his @MathMeetsFball Twitter account as a marketing ploy, but he uses so many math phrases in conversation—“Problem solved!” “There's the proof!”—that it's hard to tell which are conscious and which are not.

During the 2015 NFL draft Urschel moonlighted as a football analyst for . . . General Electric. Wearing a sweatshirt that read MATHLETE, he stood before a chalkboard and posted videos on the company's social media accounts calculating, for example, how fast No. 2 pick Marcus Mariota could launch the ball downfield (56 mph).

Urschel would love to start working on his Ph.D., but what program would accept a student who could miss weeks at the beginning or end of the semester for football? “I'll apply to Stanford, Caltech, Princeton and MIT,” he says, “the second I hang up my cleats.”

If he didn't have to return to Baltimore for minicamp in mid-June and then training camp in late July, he would have spent the off-season teaching a course at Penn State. When he began his master's during his fourth year, he taught a section of Math 041: Trigonometry and Analytic Geometry. He told students he was “Mr. Urschel, but just call me John.” It didn't take long for a few to realize this wasn't any old John, and his teaching stint instantly became Twitter and message



“I'M GRATEFUL FOR FOOTBALL,”
URSCHEL SAYS. “IT FORCED ME TO
GO OUT ON A FRIDAY NIGHT AND
NOT JUST STAY HUNCHED IN MY ROOM
PORING OVER PROBLEMS.”

DOUBLE LIFE

Though Urschel spent much of the off-season writing research papers and tweeting math puns, he's focused on football now that training camp has begun.

board fodder. Even now he can't spend 20 minutes at a State College Starbucks without being asked to pose for a selfie. A student approaches our chess match to engage in a debate about the merits of the French Defense. Then he not-so-casually slips his true motivation for striking up a conversation: “Hey wait, you're that math football player, right?”

“Ha, yeah,” Urschel says, with an awkward smile. “That's me.”

Part of Urschel's appeal is that, despite his accomplishments, he seems relatable. He's an overachiever with humility. When the Ravens drafted him in the fifth round, they had modest expectations. “At

best he would probably be a practice-squad player,” says Castillo, the O-line coach. Yet Urschel outworked his rivals, ousting veteran A.Q. Shipley for a roster spot. “Yeah, we make jokes about John being smart, like ‘Go fix the iPads,’” says Yanda, his fellow lineman. “But it’s not really a big deal. I respect him because he was the perfect rookie. He shut up and did his job.”

Because of injuries to other linemen, Urschel started five games, including two in the playoffs. With Yanda and Kelechi Osemele returning at guard, Urschel is slotted as a reserve, though Baltimore could groom him as

their future center. During the season, Urschel insists, his full attention will be on football, even if he’s not quite like his gridiron peers. Just as Urschel’s Versa is sandwiched between two monster pickup trucks in the Ravens’ parking lot, he embraces his double life, as unusual as it may be. □

Baltimore Hustle

The names may change in Ravens camp, but the intensity remains the same

+ BY EMILY KAPLAN

RAVENS COACH John Harbaugh showed up for the first day of training camp in a white T-shirt that read: RAVENS FOOTBALL IS HUSTLE. CONSTANT HUSTLE. His team showed up accordingly. Baltimore’s oldest player, 36-year-old wide receiver Steve Smith, plunged for a one-handed catch before tumbling to the grass, and quarterback Joe Flacco was quick to counsel journeyman receiver Kamar Aiken after he bobbled a catch during a one-on-one drill. For nearly three hours in broiling heat linemen battled, coaches barked and more than a few bodies flew.

When Harbaugh walked off the field, he was grinning. “We’ve had some bad-ass teams around here,” Harbaugh says. “And that’s what these guys have to understand: what the standard is.”

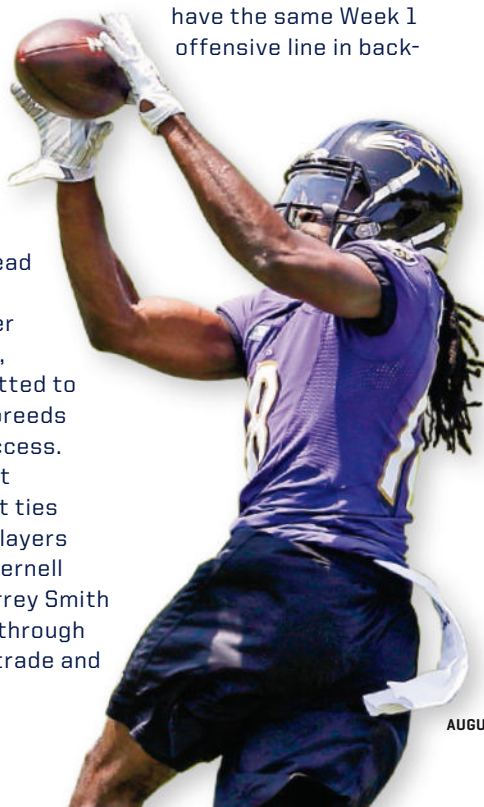
Maintaining a standard of constant hustle can prove difficult, especially with the constant reshuffling Baltimore has endured. Flacco is playing for his fourth offensive coordinator in four years, and the Ravens have just five starters remaining from the team that won the Super Bowl in February 2013. The only true continuity has been at quarterback, head coach and with general manager Ozzie Newsome, who has committed to a system that breeds sustainable success. Newsome hasn’t hesitated to cut ties with marquee players (Haloti Ngata, Pernell McPhee and Torrey Smith to name a few) through free agency or trade and

replace them with draft picks. As long as his core philosophies are intact—an aggressive defense and a sound run game setting up the rest of the attack—Newsome is confident he can plug in any missing pieces.

This year none of those holes are on the offensive line. Guards Kelechi Osemele and Marshal Yanda represent two of the five remaining starters from Baltimore’s last championship team, and for the first time in franchise history the Ravens are expected to have the same Week 1 offensive line in back-

to-back years. That leaves John Urschel in the same role he had in 2014: a quality backup rotating in as needed. Of course that could change next year with Osemele and Yanda due to be free agents. But for now Baltimore’s line hopes to replicate a season in which Flacco was sacked a career-low 19 times and running back Justin Forsett ran for 1,266 yards—more than double his previous career high.

The Ravens are the favorites in the NFL’s toughest division (the AFC North sent three teams to the playoffs after the 2014 season) and are a Super Bowl contender. Replacing Ngata is second-year defensive lineman Timmy Jernigan, and filling in for Smith is rookie Brashad Perriman (*left*), a playmaking receiver who, if he overcomes drop issues, could be a dangerous deep threat. Harbaugh won’t have any problem embracing that coaching challenge. During the season the coach is often seen wearing another T-shirt: ABILITY IS GOD-GIVEN. PROWESS IS EARNED.





Photograph by
Todd Rosenberg
For Sports Illustrated

CHICAGO'S HOPE

When she's not hanging at the Lincoln Park Zoo this season, Delle Donne is averaging a career high 34.2 minutes and has missed only one game because of Lyme disease.



CURE FOR THE BLUES

*A league beset by scandal needs a transcendent star—and the WNBA has one in **Elena Delle Donne**, who puts up historic numbers as easily as she shuts up trolls and haters*

BY ANDREW LAWRENCE

ELENA DELLE DONNE walked right into the double team. Had such a trap been set during a WNBA game or even a practice, she might have seen it coming. She is, after all, a surpassingly poised and fundamentally sound 6' 5" forward (6' 8" with bun) who is as comfortable spotting up for a three, facing up a traditional center in the paint or throwing down a dunk. But before Delle Donne could reach the comfort of the locker room at the Sky's practice gym, she was ambushed by the Chicago's social media manager, Lauren Niemiera, and videographer Amy Koeller, collectively armed with a laptop, a camera and an idea for a quick video shoot. The concept they had in mind, Mean Tweets, was familiar to Delle Donne from watching the bit on *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* in which celebrities read and react to unkind things said about them on Twitter.

She had already filmed one Mean Tweets episode, in which the most caustic comments suggested that she marry a certain Cavaliers guard so that the name on her jersey would read DELLE DONNE-DELLAVEDOVA. Then on June 24, the night before this practice, Delle Donne scored a career-high 45 points in a 100–96 overtime defeat of the Atlanta Dream. “It was one of those games that’s a blur,” she says. “I just remember feeling very confident, whatever I put up was going to go in.” *SportsCenter* quickly tweeted out the key stats from her epic performance, in which she shot 60.0%, drained 19 straight free throws, grabbed 11 rebounds and blocked six shots—even if the tweeter spelled her name Della Donne.



DAVID DOWNBAE/GETTY IMAGES

ELENA DELLE DONNE

Niemiera tracked the reactions to ESPN's tweet deep into the night. Men make up 70% of the WNBA's viewing audience on ESPN but close to 100% of the social media trolls. "Any time a major network posts something about women's sports, it's like there's a total divide," Niemiera says. "If you're not pro, you're totally against."

Once Niemiera and Kohler handed over a laptop loaded with a selection of sexist material, the 25-year-old Delle Donne didn't need much coaxing to participate. One user wrote, "I'd rather watch professional lawn mowing." Another piled on, "Better be men's professional lawn mowing though. The women's game is fundamentally solid, but there's no pizzaz [sic]." When Delle Donne read, "that doesn't look like a kitchen to me," her eyes widened. "Oh, my goodness!" she said with a mix of shock and sarcasm. "People are absurd! My God, welcome to 2015. How does he even have a computer?"

Released on June 25, the 2½-minute video made Delle Donne a trending topic all over again. Publicity has often been a challenge for the WNBA, but in this, its 19th season, news hooks have not been hard to find.

IF ONE MARK of a league's maturity is an ability to generate headlines, then consider the W all grown up. The first bombshell dropped last February, when superstar guard Diana Taurasi—who led the Phoenix Mercury to the 2014 title—announced that she was sitting out the '15 season. UMMC Ekaterinburg, the Russian Premier League team that she plays for during the winter, offered her close to 15 times her WNBA salary, or about \$1.5 million, to take her first summer vacation since turning pro in 2004.

On April 22, 6' 8" Mercury center Brittney Griner, the 2014 defensive player of the year, made headlines when she and her fiancée, Glory Johnson (a forward for the Tulsa Shock) were arrested on misdemeanor charges of assault and disorderly conduct. (Each player was suspended for seven games by the league. Griner agreed to undergo 26 weeks of

*"She's every
bit as good
posting up as
she is a jump
shooter and
shotmaker and
playmaker,"
says an
opposing coach.*



domestic violence counseling in exchange for a full dismissal of the charges. Johnson pleaded not guilty, and the charges against her were dropped in June.) Three weeks after the arrests they were married. A month after that, Johnson announced she was pregnant and would miss the '15 season. The next day Griner filed for an annulment. Johnson subsequently revealed she was carrying twins.

While that saga was playing out, Seattle Storm center Lauren Jackson and Los Angeles Sparks forward Candace Parker, who have won a combined five MVP trophies, took their own sabbaticals from the WNBA—Jackson to recover from a series of knee surgeries and Parker to rebound from a long season abroad with UMMC Ekaterinburg. (She returned to action on July 29, and was averaging 16.4 points and 9.8 rebounds through week's end.)

Then on May 6, Isiah Thomas was named president of the New York Liberty. The hiring came eight years after a jury awarded \$11.6 million to former Knicks executive Anucha Browne Sanders in a sexual harassment suit brought against Madison Square Garden, parent company of the Liberty and the Knicks. As president of basketball operations



MAKING IT COUNT

Delle Donne is one of the league's most effective shooters (33.5 PER) for the WNBA's most efficient offense.

for the Knicks, Thomas had created a hostile work environment for Sanders. Protesters surrounded the Garden for the Liberty's first home game, and the WNBA players' union is trying to prevent Thomas from taking an ownership stake in the team. (On June 22 the league and the Liberty agreed to table the ownership discussion indefinitely.)

And just when the WNBA seemed poised to return to its usual place on the agate page, Shock majority owner Bill Cameron announced plans on July 20 to relocate the team to Dallas-Fort Worth. "It's unfortunate that the problems get us top of mind," says Sky coach Pokey Chatman, "but at least it has some different people tuning in."

Delle Donne, the WNBA's best—and most popular—player, has provided plenty of reasons for people to tune in. Through Sunday she ranked fourth in rebounds (8.8) and third in blocks (2.08), and her scoring average (24.2) was three points

WHO WILL CHALLENGE DELLE DONNE FOR MVP?



MAYA MOORE

The 6-foot forward and 2014 MVP has led the Lynx to the top of the Western Conference with 21.2 points and 7.0 rebounds per game.



TINA CHARLES

As the Liberty's offensive focal point, the 6' 4" center is averaging 17.6 points, 9.1 boards and a career-high 2.4 assists.



BRITTNEY GRINER

No player has a greater impact on D than the 6' 8" Mercury center, who averages 4.35 blocks (plus 15.4 points and 8.5 rebounds).

higher than that of the next most prodigious player, Minnesota Lynx forward Maya Moore. Delle Donne maintains that advantage despite taking the majority of her shots from midrange and beyond the arc; her success rate, 47.1%, is tied for sixth among players who average at least 10 attempts. "And she's not just a perimeter player," says Minnesota assistant Jim Petersen. "She's every bit as good posting up as she is a jump shooter and shotmaker and playmaker. She's like our Kevin Durant."

Delle Donne topped the All-Star balloting with 18,034 votes. It was her third straight selection but the first time she was healthy enough to participate. She missed the 2013 game with a concussion. Last year she was suffering from a flare-up of Lyme disease, a chronic ailment she contracted in 2008 on her family's 35-acre property near Wilmington, Del. Her illness also sidelined her for 17 regular-season games. Delle Donne bounced back, though, to lead the Sky to their first WNBA Finals, only to be shut down again with back spasms. (Her absence paved the way for a three-game sweep by Taurasi, Griner & Co.)

FEMALE ATHLETES are having a moment in 2015. As triumphs pile up for performers such as the U.S. women's soccer team, Serena Williams and Ronda Rousey, more and more skeptics are becoming fans. Women's pro basketball, however, is still not feeling the love. There remains a vocal population that won't settle for simply not watching the women play. These particular fans feel, more or less, that women have no business being on a basketball court.

Much of the criticism of the women's game stems from the fact that it is—most of the time—played below the rim. A June op-ed in *The New York Times* suggested that the WNBA lower the baskets to increase interest. "Currently," wrote Asher Price, a reporter for the *Austin American-Statesman*, "the women's game relies on jump shots, which translates to lower shooting percentages and a more workaday style." A study done by the WNBA, however, compared the flow of the women's game with the NBA's and found nearly identical numbers: The women scored 87.1% of their points in the half-court (compared with the men's 86.3%) and 12.9% of their points in transition (versus 13.7%).

Lowering the rims is not a new argument; former WNBA president Val Ackerman and UConn coach Gene Auriemma have supported such a measure. What's more, Delle Donne says she "is not completely opposed" to one of the central points made in the *Times* op-ed, that dunking would give women "the opportunity to fully express their raw athleticism."

"I'd be able to throw down dunks a lot easier,"



ELENA DELLE DONNE

she says. If there is an element of dunking that troubles her, it's that it overshadows other, more nuanced aspects of the game. "People expect [dunks] all the time," she says. "It has gotten rid of the heart of what basketball is—the fundamentals, and that's what the women's game represents. I don't know. I love the fundamentals. I'm a fundamental player."

FINALS DESTINATION

MVP talk is nice, but Delle Donne wants nothing more than to lead the Sky to its first title.

THE ONLY VULNERABILITY in Delle Donne's game is something she can't fully control: Lyme disease. Chatman says the illness never dissuaded her from selecting Delle Donne, then a Delaware senior, with the No. 2 pick (after Griner) in the 2013 draft. "I used to watch Elena play when she played AAU ball as a teenager, knowing she wasn't coming to the South and I was coaching at LSU," Chatman recalls. "She was just so fun to watch. Now we're back together."

Delle Donne, though, didn't feel like a lock to end up in Chicago—a city she knew almost nothing about. ("Me being clueless," she says, "when we flew in and I saw Lake Michigan, I was like, There's an ocean in Chicago? I had no idea that lakes could be that big.") She worried that her protracted battles with Lyme, which had cost her 18 starts in college, might sour the Sky and others. "Teams worry about injuries," she says, "and that's something you can heal and never have to worry about again. But an illness that has shown in the past that I've relapsed over and over? That's scary."

Chatman, though, did her homework. She researched the disease extensively, to the point where she can "talk the Lyme lingo," Delle Donne says, "which is nice because a lot of people don't even believe it's a real thing." Even more frustrating than the flare-ups—which Delle Donne describes as like having the flu with a migraine thrown in for kicks—is the fact that there is no cure, much less a standard regimen for prevention and recovery. "There's a big rift between the holistic community and the medical community," says Chatman, "but Elena knows her body."

Managing that body is almost like a second job for Delle Donne, who takes more than 50 supplements a day. She also spends a lot of time on the massage table, and locked in furious internal debates about what to eat and

how much to rest. Another way she protects herself is by not playing during the off-season. "It would just be too much on my body," says Delle Donne, who hasn't lacked lucrative offers from foreign teams. "I told my agent, 'Don't even tell me the numbers. I don't want to know.'"

While she does make extra money through endorsements with Nike, DuPont and Bikini.com, as well as through speaking engagements, not going overseas gives Delle Donne months to work on her game, on her own turf and at her own pace. That enabled her to become even more versatile in Year 1 (when she finished as the league's top rookie), pack on 12 pounds of muscle in Year 2 (though her dedication to accomplish this may have contributed to that early Lyme-related flare-up) and take on added defensive responsibilities in Year 3 (in the absence of All-Star center Sylvia Fowles, who refused to play the first 17 games until she was traded to Minnesota).

While the Sky (15–11 at week's end) are still developing on defense (they allow 1.019 points per possession, which ranks seventh in the league), they lead the league in offensive efficiency (1.057 PPP, compared with 99.0 last season). The improved scoring is due to Delle Donne's ability to play off All-Star combo guard Cappie Pondexter (15.1 points and 2.0 assists) and point guard Courtney Vandersloot (11.3 points, 5.8 assists), as well as guard Allie Quigley (10.0 points, 42.0% shooting).

Delle Donne is playing a career-high 34.2 minutes and says she's feeling good. Resting in the off-season has been the right decision for her, though she might make one exception to represent her country in the 2016 Rio Games. "She is legitimately a contender for [the national] team," says director Carol Callan, who is spoiled for choices to fill 12 roster spots. "And it wouldn't necessarily require someone to get injured for her either."

She would love nothing more than to end the season with a championship and then head to Colorado Springs to join the national team in training camp. She could team up with another coach—Auriemma, whose UConn program she famously joined for two days before leaving Storrs and ending up at Delaware.

Delle Donne knows she's bound to be criticized no matter what she does. But she welcomes the chance to stand up for the game she loves. If more Mean Tweets videos need to be filmed, so be it. She can give as good as she gets. "People can hide behind a computer screen and think they're all big and bad," she says. "It's fun to call 'em out." □

JEFF HAWES FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

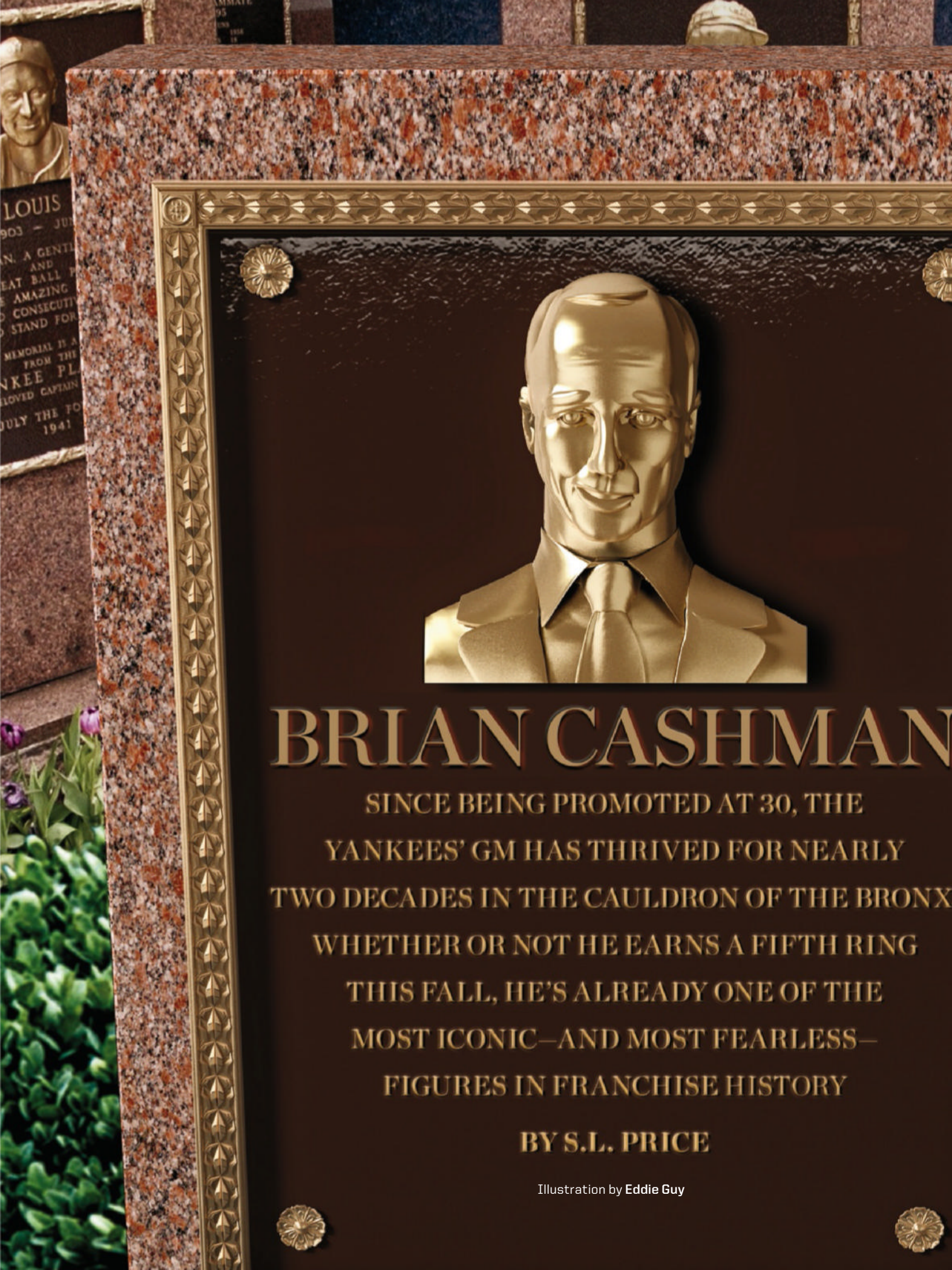
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BRIAN CASHMAN

SINCE BEING PROMOTED AT 30, THE
YANKEES' GM HAS THRIVED FOR NEARLY
TWO DECADES IN THE CAULDRON OF THE BRONX
WHETHER OR NOT HE EARNS A FIFTH RING
THIS FALL, HE'S ALREADY ONE OF THE
MOST ICONIC—AND MOST FEARLESS—
FIGURES IN FRANCHISE HISTORY

BY S.L. PRICE

Illustration by Eddie Guy



DIAMOND IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES (MONUMENT PARK BACKGROUND)

CONSIDER THE F-WORD.

Not officially: Officially, the four-letter bomb remains undroppable before mom or minister, and must hit the mainstream defused by dash or bleep. Other obscenities have lost clout, gone respectable, but f@*! still provides the FCC and a keyboard's top row with steady work.

Still, a part of us, the 10-year-old part, enjoys a good f-bomb explosion, its unspinnable, blast-wave honesty. Madonna on David Letterman in 1994, Dick Cheney on the Senate floor in 2004: Every decade has its profane episode to publicly condemn and secretly savor. "Felt better," Cheney admitted, "after I had done it."

Brian Cashman won't make that claim. How can he? As general manager of the Yankees he oversees the most-storied franchise in American sports, a job many would call far more serious than Vice President. So, no, the fact that during the team's incendiary 2013 medical/legal/public relations war with its star slugger and serial PED abuser, Alex Rodriguez, Cashman delighted headline writers by snapping to a reporter, "Alex should just shut the f--- up"—that can hardly be an official point of pride.

"I blew my top," Cashman says one Saturday last month in his office at Yankee Stadium. "I got calls from managers, general managers, agents, players. They were all, 'I've been wanting to say that, good for you.' But I was embarrassed. I conduct myself, for the most part, at a much higher standard than that."

Of course, he says this amid the bizarre matter of A-Rod and the Yankees now: Still together and, even stranger, peaceable and winning. Sure, there's been a rise in f-bombs among the pinstriped faithful over the last three weeks, when New York's seven-game late-July lead in the American League East dissolved, but who figured these Yankees to even have a lead to lose? Many factors—first baseman Mark Teixeira's surgically repaired right wrist, the chasm left by retired shortstop Derek Jeter, the flimsy starting pitching—pointed to a third straight year out of the playoffs.

"That's the beautiful thing, right?" says utilityman Brendan Ryan. "Everybody was counting us out."

But then came Teixeira's 30-homer revival, Didi Gregorius's solid work at short, the lockdown closing of Andrew Miller and—most unlikely of all—a Rodriguez free of rust and off-field drama. After surgeries on each hip, at 40 he is crushing the ball harder than he has in six years, hitting .267 mostly as a DH with 24 home runs and 63 RBIs, the hub of one of baseball's most potent offenses.

New York had hoped to be rid of A-Rod by now, had explored voiding the remaining five seasons and \$114 million on his contract in 2013, and had spent much of the spring wrestling with the



BRIAN CASHMAN

disposition of his tainted milestone bonuses (eventually donated to charity). Their strange-bedfellow relations remain cool at best, but at least there's this: Rodriguez has, indeed, shut up. All season he has held himself uncharacteristically in check, refusing interviews, restricting his postgame comments to gratitude for a third (or is it a fourth?) chance and his desire to win.

"He's been great," Cashman says, voice going strikingly flat at the mention of Rodriguez's name. "Whatever he articulates, it makes sense, and he's supportive of his teammates, he's humble, he's throwing bouquets to the opponents, he's respectful. He's performed at an amazing level and, so. . ."

For all the credit due Rodriguez, any way you see it—suit versus player, 5' 7" balding nebbish versus towering alpha male, stoicism versus blather—the turnabout signals a clear victory for the 48-year-old Cashman. "The great part about watching Brian's career," says former Reds and Nationals GM Jim Bowden, "is that whether it be off-the-field personal issues or Yankees issues or George Steinbrenner issues, he was always able to rope-a-dope in the corner and figure out when to make the next punch, the next move. He knows when to lay low and when to step up, when you say something and when you don't."

Well, as the 48-year-old Cashman says, *for the most part*. The A-Rod f-bomb exemplified what has become, in recent years, Cashman's increasing bent for blunt talk and risk-taking behavior. Some of it has been harmless, as when Cashman rappelled down a Stamford, Conn., high-rise in an elf costume or slept on a sidewalk to raise money for homeless youth. Some has been impolitic, like his publicly challenging Jeter during contract talks or calling critics "stupid" or "irritating" or "psycho." And some has hurt: the fibula Cashman snapped skydiving, or the tabloid stories about the relationship that, in 2011, helped end his 17-year marriage, resulting in his allegedly being stalked and extorted, and that may well land Cashman in a witness chair to testify for the prosecution.

Such extracurriculars—not to mention his .594 winning percentage, four world championships and six AL pennants over 18 years—are rare, especially in an age when GM has largely supplanted manager as baseball's vital job. But Cashman has never been easily categorized. If baseball execs these days seem to be either bland ex-scouts or bland metrics-mad wonderboys, Cashman occupies the slot for underestimated, L.L. Bean–style grinds who delight in mixing the message. Why else point out, with eyebrows dancing, the paperweight front and center on his desk: steel Looney Tunes-ian bomb figurine, wick unlit, fronted with a lower-case F.

"A moment that I'm not proud of," Cashman says again.

Of course he's proud. He handled the player. He protected his team, Bronx style. But these are delicate days. The two men need each other now; indeed, with A-Rod's help, this could be the year that Cashman proves himself not just diligent but wise; a master builder like the A's Billy Beane or the Cubs' Theo Epstein.



F-BOMBS AWAY

Cashman has dealt with A-Rod (above) and groomed Girardi (above, right) by using skills honed under Steinbrenner (right, with Torre).



"At the same time," Cashman says, reaching into a desk drawer, "I am a prankster." And the custodian of Ruth, Gehrig and DiMaggio cocks and hurls a novelty paper snapper—*crack!*—at the wall covered by the name of every player in his system.

"I'll walk you out and you'll see," he says. "I got a fart machine out in the hallway."

HIS RISE? It's like a sitcom subplot that began on a stoned whim, somehow clicked . . . and then took on a life of its own. Steinbrenner's Yankees were an executive chop shop in the decade before 1986, when Cashman hooked on. Office wags dubbed GM Woody Woodward the Pharmacist for his fortifying collection of prescription pills and medicines, and when, in '87, Cashman saw Woodward buckling—*Yessir, yessir, yessir*—while the irate owner ordered that Woodward apologize for a trade that Steinbrenner had demanded, Cashman told himself, *I would never want that job*.

At least a half dozen far more proud and pedigreed baseball minds came through Steinbrenner's revolving door in Cashman's time, and only he held on. Around the office they called him—hell, he called himself—George Costanza, because his ascension to assistant GM in the early 1990s so neatly coincided with the bumbblings of a short, bald Yankees exec on *Seinfeld*.

"It was totally surreal," says Larry Rocca,



In the opener against D.C.'s Wilson High, Cashman blew a sure touchdown—60 yards of open field—when a pass slipped through his hands. Later in the year he caught a diving touchdown to beat archrival Bullis, but 30 years on he recalls only the failure. “Every now and then it’ll hit me,” Cashman says, “and I’ll wince.”

He treated sports like work, even then. His father, John, had run away from home on Long Island to work horses, standardbreds. Then came horse sales and auctions, then a 20-year stint as general manager of Castleton Farm in Lexington, Ky., with its 2,000-plus lush acres as well as Pompano Park in Florida, where George Steinbrenner and Whitey Ford came out to play.

“Nothing was a holiday,” says Cashman’s mother, Nancy. “When John and I traveled, we went to race-tracks. Brian is like his father: It was business, period. Always on the phone. Other people wouldn’t tolerate it, but that was right, you know? Doing business while you’re having dinner.”

John became friendly with Steinbrenner, though the latter’s purchase of a stallion almost ended things. “The horse doesn’t work—take him back!” the Boss demanded. John refused. “George didn’t talk to him for a year,” Nancy says. “Then suddenly the horse started to perform, and he called: ‘The horse is doing well!’”

There were five kids, Brian in the middle. The Cashmans lived rich, rent-free in prime Kentucky horse country, but weren’t rich themselves. Everyone worked. Brian hated the horses; a blacksmith handed him a hot horseshoe once, and he never got over it. So then he got stuck with the worst jobs: collecting barn garbage on “maggot detail”; avoiding thrashing hoofs and teeth and holding the tail while a vet went shoulder-deep

one of Cashman’s teammates at Georgetown Prep in North Bethesda, Md. Rocca had grown up a baseball nerd, studying statistics and knowing every player. In 1996, covering the World Series for *The Orange County* (Calif.) *Register*, Rocca happened upon his pal in the winning clubhouse—cigar in mouth, a step away from the top job. “Can you f----- believe this?” Cashman roared.

Not at first. But then Rocca flashed back to their senior year, when Georgetown’s powerhouse football program was depleted; the coach needed speed, and everyone kept talking about this second baseman, a boarder out of Kentucky who stole bases as easy as breathing. The coach was lucky. Cashman never minded looking foolish.

He had never played a down of football in his life. They tried him at punt returns, defensive back: Balls kept bouncing off his pads. He settled in at wide receiver but was still finding his locker-room bearings when he walked by a couple of starters, both bigger and quite tough. A hand yanked off Cashman’s towel, exposing him, and when he reached for it someone snapped a towel sharp against his ass. “Don’t do that again,” he said. When Cashman reached again, another towel snapped.

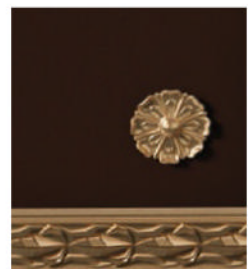
“Mother-----, I told you to stop!” Cashman growled, and now he was standing there, fists clenched. “Completely naked, veins bulging,” Rocca says. “They’re fully clothed, and he’s ready to fight them both.”

HIS RISE? IT’S LIKE A SITCOM SUBPLOT.

up a pregnant mare’s womb; shoveling placenta and manure out of steaming stalls. Escaping that for baseball was heaven. As a 12-year-old, Brian got locked inside an emptied Riverfront Stadium in Cincinnati, and the anxious adults tried reassuring him through a gate. “Pick me up tomorrow!” Brian said.

Georgetown University rejected him. He got wait-listed at Boston College. Cashman thought he would walk on in baseball at Tulane, but two weeks before classes began, Division III Catholic University in D.C. guaranteed him a starting spot as a freshman. It was so late that the school, in a crime-blighted neighborhood, had no beds left. Cashman slept his first nights in a dorm hallway. “It’ll work out,” he said.

From the start he was one of Catholic’s best players, hitting leadoff, owning second base. In 1988, Cashman set a school single-season record for hits, 52 in 38 games, that lasted 11 years.





BRIAN CASHMAN

Size was no issue. He stepped in fast when things got hostile in a bar, was the first to bark across the field, “One of yours is going down for that!” after a too-hard slide. “Any challenging situation, Brian was right there in the middle, and he would step in front,” says Matt Seiler, Cashman’s double play partner. “He was very serious, very intense. A very good judge of people. We’d meet someone the first time and say, ‘This guy seems nice,’ and he’d say, ‘No, he’ll let you down. This guy doesn’t have what it takes.’”

THE SPRING of his freshman year, during Catholic’s annual trip to Florida, Cashman’s father told him to head over to Pompano Park for a free meal; Nancy had already talked to George about a summer job. The track flack, one of the Boss’s buddies, flashed a 1978 World Series ring. “What if I can get you an internship with the New York Yankees?” the flack said.

So, yes: connections.

The day after classes ended in May 1986, Brian drove north and checked in for the summer at a Fort Lee, N.J., hotel. He’d get to Yankee Stadium by 8:30 a.m., spend hours transcribing the nightly game reports from all over the farm system, run stats out to all the necessities, fetch the GM’s lunch, maybe take a player to the doctor. Nights, he’d work stadium security, keeping boozed-up fans from killing one another in the stands; it was midnight by the time he banged into his room, shirt often torn or bloodied.

There was one office rule, whispered: If you see the Boss coming, go the other way. Cashman’s baptism came when he got roped into driving Steinbrenner to a haircut and then to the airport. A combination of traffic, an unexpected bridge closure and Cashman’s confusion brought forth a barrage of f-bombs from the backseat. “You dumbass!” Steinbrenner said. Cashman hit a massive pothole, and the owner caught air. “This isn’t a f----- tank!”

Cashman came back for more the next two summers. It was a baseball kid’s dream, for the most part; the Mets owned the city then, but the Yanks always had their history. Once he was in the elevator when Mickey Mantle stepped in, and for one full floor it was just him and the Mick, lubricated. At Club Level the doors slid open, and the waiting clot of fans couldn’t believe their luck: *Mickey!* Mantle handed out a bunch of presigned baseball cards, sweet as could be. Then the doors closed. “How f----- dare you let these people f----- approach me?” he said.

“Then he stumbled off the elevator, and I went down to the clubhouse,” says Cashman. “He crushed me.”

In 1989, Cashman graduated Catholic with a history degree and was mulling law school or a job with UPS when the Yankees dangled a position as baseball operations assistant. The way Bowden, just two months into his job as an assistant senior VP, recalls it, Steinbrenner walked the kid into the baseball ops office and into a crowd including Gene (Stick) Michael, Lou Piniella, Bob Quinn, Dallas Green and Syd Thrift. “I want to introduce you to Brian Cashman,” Steinbrenner said. “His dad is a good friend . . . and someday you’ll all be fired and he’ll be the general manager of the



TALK A GOOD GAME

A driven second baseman in college (above), Cashman is blunt with the media—as when he announced he hadn’t wanted to sign Soriano (right).



Yankees.” Everybody in the room laughed.

Three months later Cashman escorted Bowden out. In July 1990, Steinbrenner began his 2½-year ban for paying a gambler to dig up dirt on Dave Winfield, and Cashman spent the next two years in Tampa, as assistant farm director. With Steinbrenner sidelined, Michael took over the daily operations; Cashman grabbed his coattails, made himself indispensable. “Brian knew everything going on,” Michael says. “Nothing slipped by.”

Michael elevated Cashman to assistant GM late in 1992, just months before Steinbrenner’s return, and he soon became one of the Boss’s favorite targets. The phone calls were relentless, the abuse humiliating. By ’96, Cashman had mastered the dull, vital details of baseball ops—contract rules, arbitration, administrative deadlines, keeping track of any throw-ins on deals that Steinbrenner promised and forgot—and yet was grinding his teeth so furiously at night that it sounded like chewing gravel. Friends urged him to seek counseling, but how would that help? Hadn’t he seen Steinbrenner angrier than he’d ever seen him, veins popping in his neck, the morning his ’96 World Series champions were about to parade through the Canyon of Heroes? “Why are wives on the floats?” the Boss screamed at three star players just hours after they’d brought him his first title in 18 years. “Get your wife off there or you’re gone!” And that’s when Cashman realized: *You will never make him happy.*



“NO,” CASHMAN YELLED BACK. “THIS SAYS A ‘HIGH-LEVEL YANKEE OFFICIAL.’ I’M JUST A F----- CLERK!”

So he chose his spots, found ways to push back. “Who asked you? You’re just a f----- clerk,” Steinbrenner sneered during one front-office gathering, everyone staring down at their binders. Cashman waited a month, until details from an organizational meeting spilled into the *Daily News* and the *New York Post* and the drip-drip was driving Steinbrenner mad. “Who’s leaking this s---?” he demanded from the backseat one afternoon. “Was this you, Cashman?”

“No,” Cashman yelled back, holding up one of the tabs. “This says it was a ‘high-level Yankee official.’ I’m just a clerk, remember? I’m just a f----- clerk!”

I**N TRUTH**, George liked that. A part of Steinbrenner knew he had to be reined in and appreciated it when a loyalist like Michael stood firm. “You want this player?” Stick would say. “Fine. But I’m telling the media it was your idea.”

Cashman filed that away. He also saw Michael’s successor, Bob Watson, develop heart trouble and high blood pressure in his three years as GM and wanted no part of it. When Watson told Cashman he’d quit and recommended him, the 30-year-old spent a half hour begging him to reconsider.

On Feb. 3, 1998, the Yankees called a press conference at the Stadium. The elevator doors opened and Cashman walked down the hall, the second-youngest GM in major league history, hand-in-hand with his wife, Mary. “This is a guy I’d never seen afraid,” says Larry Rocca, then a baseball writer at *Newsday*. “But he looked terrified.”

When Cashman had accepted the job, in a lunch downtown with Steinbrenner on Groundhog Day, he insisted on a handshake, \$300,000 deal for one year. Rocca gave him till mid-April, and nearly had it right: The ’98 Yankees started 1–4. “Stick, you’re going to have to go back in and take over,” Steinbrenner told Michael. “I don’t know if Brian can do this.” Michael stalled and reassured. “Give him some time,” he said. “And then,” Rocca says, “they win 125 games.”

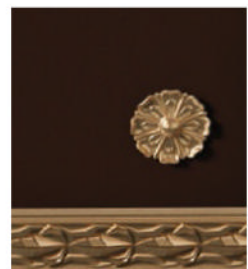
The Yankees won, in fact, three World Series in Cashman’s first three years, something no other big league GM—not even Ed Barrow, architect of New York’s 1920s dynasty—has ever pulled off. Problem was, everyone knew those were Michael’s teams, with the core of Jeter, Bernie Williams, Andy Pettitte, Jorge Posada and Mariano Rivera fostered by scouting savants Bill Livesey and Brian Sabean. There was no chance of Cashman’s being hailed a wunderkind.

His peers knew, though, that it was Cashman who, as longtime manager Joe Torre says, “had the courage” to ship folk hero David Wells to Toronto for the hated Roger Clemens in 1999.

And it was Cashman who pulled off the stunning midseason trade with the Indians for slugger David Justice in 2000, a deal so immediate in its payoff—Justice was named ALCS MVP—that it still sparks envy. “It hit like a lightning bolt,” Beane says. “I don’t think anyone thought Justice was even available.”

Beane also credits Cashman with adjusting quickly to—and throwing all kinds of Yankees money at—the early 2000s analytics revolution Beane pioneered in Oakland. But the Cashman tool he fears is more basic. The two have been friendly since 1997, and no matter how casual the chat, Beane knows Cashman is taking exhaustive, always accessible notes. “Like a lawyer,” he says. “He’ll bring you—verbatim—a conversation you had regarding a player nine months earlier on some date in November when you were thinking about what size Butterball to pick up.”

In his two stints as a GM, Bowden completed four trades with Cashman. “I remember the last one, because it’s the only trade I beat him on—Johnny Albaladejo for Tyler Clippard,” he says. “Even the greatest GMs in the game, the John Schuerholzes, have traded David Cone for Ed Hearn or Adam Wainwright for J.D. Drew. But Brian doesn’t have a lot of those.”





BRIAN CASHMAN

He's had his misses. Cashman bears the blame for acquiring Jeff Weaver, Carl Pavano and Kei Igawa, and for needing to be saved, in 1998, from signing the cancerous Albert Belle; expensive bets on outfielder Jacoby Ellsbury, catcher Brian McCann and now-depleted pitcher CC Sabathia may well never pay off. His influence has waxed and waned, sometimes by the week. Padres GM Kevin Towers knew before Cashman that the Yankees were signing Kenny Lofton in January 2004; a month later Cashman was back in the thick of it—sealing the financial sweeteners, massaging A-Rod's concession to move from shortstop to third base—when New York traded Alfonso Soriano to the Rangers for Rodriguez. “Since Babe Ruth, probably the biggest move in franchise history,” Cashman says. “The Boss was so proud of that one.”

But by early 2005, Cashman was again getting overruled on free agents; everybody from the scouting director to agent Scott Boras to Steinbrenner's pals seemed to have a hand on the 25-man roster. Dodgers owner Frank McCourt came calling, offering to double Cashman's salary; it was only when he said “I'm not coming back” that Steinbrenner paid attention. “Why are you leaving me?” he asked. Cashman demanded—and got, in writing—full control of baseball operations. No GM under the Boss ever had so much clout.

“Cash still had people to answer to,” Torre says. “But once he signed that deal, it changed his demeanor. It gave him the authority to really do his job.”

Cashman didn't want A-Rod back. When Rodriguez famously opted out of his 10-year contract during the 2007 playoffs, Cashman argued hard against the new 10-year, \$275 million deal: A-Rod's insecurities had become a headache, and would only be more of a burden without Texas covering \$67 million of his contract. In what became the biggest, most crippling transaction of the post-Boss era—deteriorating health led Steinbrenner to cede control to his sons in '10—Rodriguez's star power proved too much for the Yankees and their YES Network to resist.

“The guy that made that decision,” says managing general partner Hal Steinbrenner, “is me.”

Yet if Hal became, as Cashman puts it, the “new sheriff,” Cashman hardly rode into the sunset. It was his call to replace Torre's gut-level managing with Joe Girardi, whose by-the-book style leans happily on Cashman's quantitative-analysis department. After Cashman's flirtation with the Mariners further cemented Hal's support, the GM personally landed Sabathia in the winter of 2008 amid the \$423 million spending spree that resulted in the '09 title. He'll never have total control; in '11, Cashman stated—at the welcoming press conference—that he was against the team's signing of reliever Rafael Soriano. But it was also a sign that he has jarringly free rein to speak his mind.

“For certain players and people, it's too much candor,” says Casey Close, Jeter's agent. “He feels the easiest way to deal with something is to punch it right between the eyes. For some that's the right mode. For players who need a softer approach, it's like, Wow, that guy just hit me between the eyes.”

FLIGHT RISK

An adrenaline junkie, Cashman rappels down buildings and skydives for charity—and for fun.



“FOR CERTAIN PEOPLE, IT'S TOO MUCH CANDOR,” SAYS CLOSE.

It was Cashman, too, who directed Jeter to patch up his public relationship with Rodriguez in 2006, and who before the '08 season—after Torre neglected to do so—stunned the Gold Glove shortstop by demanding that he improve his diminishing range. Then, late in '10, amid a contentious dispute over Jeter's next contract, Cashman told reporters that the enormously popular star should “test the market” and try to find a better offer elsewhere. “If he can, fine,” Cashman said.

That he had little chance of winning so public a game of hardball didn't seem to matter. Cashman calls Jeter “the greatest player I will have ever had,” but often admitted impatience with Jeter's divalike tendencies. He likes being one of the few to tell the Captain no. During one of their last face-to-face meetings, in 2010, Jeter asked Cashman, “Who would you rather have playing shortstop this year than me?”

“Do you really want me to answer that?” Cashman said. Told to go ahead, Cashman instantly named the Rockies' Troy Tulowitzki and was ready to list a few more. Wiser heads stepped in, but not before Cashman



KEEPING THE FARM

BY SHUNNING BIG TRADES THAT WOULD COST TOP PROSPECTS, CASHMAN HOPES TO GET BACK TO WHERE HE STARTED

THE BLUE JAYS have caught up to the Yankees this month by following the Bronx Bombers' old playbook. Over the past three years Toronto has dealt more than a dozen prospects for shortstop Troy Tulowitzki, third baseman Josh Donaldson, and starters R.A. Dickey, Mark Buehrle and David Price, while signing catcher Russell Martin to an \$82 million free-agent deal.

Brian Cashman has chosen a different approach. For the third straight trade deadline, with a playoff spot in the balance, he has hoarded his increasingly deep well of prospects and made only minor deals—even letting aces like Price, Johnny Cueto and Cole Hamels find their way to AL rivals. By keeping pitcher Luis Severino, outfielder Aaron Judge and shortstop Jorge Mateo, all top 100 prospects, Cashman is taking a long-term approach designed to improve

New York both on the field and on the balance sheet. Of the Yankees' top 11 position players this year, just one was a farm product, which is how you end up paying \$218 million for an aging roster battling for a wild card.

Cashman can see the end of the line: first baseman Mark Teixeira (*left*), outfielder Carlos Beltran and lefty CC Sabathia (depending on a vesting option) come off the payroll in 2017, DH Alex Rodriguez in '18, and catcher Brian McCann and third

baseman Chase Headley in '19. Cashman can see a time when the Yankees are no longer coughing up \$20 million to \$30 million a year in luxury-tax money. The only way to do that, though, is to have young talent ready to play.

Transitions aren't easy. New York may miss the postseason this year and again next year—almost the entire roster is still signed for 2016—which would mean four straight seasons without October baseball. At the end of this cycle, though, is the prospect of what the 1990s Yankees had: a young homegrown core supplemented by, rather than reliant upon, free agents. Cashman's approach requires patience, and it pays off in pennants.

—Joe Sheehan

could say, "We're not paying extra money for popularity. We're paying for performance."

Jeter signed a three-year, \$51 million deal and finished his career in 2014 with a walk-off single in his final home at bat. But his relationship with Cashman never recovered.

"Sometimes honesty hurts," Cashman says. "But if you're being paid to do a job, do the job. You have to honor the job description; if not, you're a fraud or stealing money. You can't fake your way doing this. You either do it or you don't."

HOW WELL does Cashman honor it?

"If anybody else had done what Brian's been doing, you know what'd be in front of his name? *Future Hall of Famer*," Beane says. "There was a time I voted for him for Executive of the Year every year, regardless."

Despite winning an average 96 games a year and missing the playoffs just three times, Cashman has never won that award and most likely never will. Cooperstown is no lock, either; only five GMs have made it in, and the franchise's massive financial edge makes him easy to dismiss. Then again, Cashman never had the luxury—like, say, Epstein as the Cubs' GM—of averaging 95 losses for three years.

"He survived in the biggest sports city in the world, the biggest media center, working for the toughest owner in the world—and delivered how many world champions?" says Watson. "The Yankees have been relevant since '95. We're talking about the kind of baseball man he is, and the type of man. He's a survivor. A winner."





BRIAN CASHMAN

Of course, Cashman's decision to stand pat at the trade deadline—while division rival Toronto nabbed ace David Price and, yes, Tulowitzki—sets up a clear moment of truth. The Yankees' inability to grow talent has been a two-decade knock: Since the rise of Jeter & Co., the farm system has produced just two everyday starters (Brett Gardner and Robinson Cano, now with Seattle). But now Cashman is loaded with primed prospects like pitcher Luis Severino, rightfielder Aaron Judge, first baseman Greg Bird and shortstop Jorge Mateo; Rodriguez's revival helped convince him the time was now.

In mid-July, Cashman stopped A-Rod in the stadium parking lot. "We need anything?" Cashman asked. Not much, was the reply. If his slugger's mouthings have irked Cashman in the past, no one questions Rodriguez's baseball smarts. "I asked only because I know that he might have something to give. If it's a good idea, I don't care where it comes from," Cashman says. He shrugs. "He likes our team."

Indeed, like Rodriguez, whose 2015 surge has played out in an oddly feel-good zone, Cashman is now operating in a space beyond legacy. More A-Rod home runs? Whose mind will they change?

Another title? A sudden collapse? Hal Steinbrenner considers any season out of the playoffs "embarrassing," and if the Yankees lose the division, Cashman's inaction at the deadline will not be forgotten. But whatever happens from here on out, it can't really alter Cashman's reputation. "I don't have to prove myself anywhere," he says.

George died in 2010, and Cashman's own father passed with pancreatic cancer in '12. September, early morning: Brian was in the room. The loss capped a brutal year. In February, Louise Meanwell, aka Louise Neathway, a 36-year British national with a history of harassment and protection orders, was arrested for allegedly extorting \$6,000 from Cashman and was charged with grand larceny and aggravated harassment. He had been separated from his wife and two children for more than a year. Two days after the arrest Mary Cashman filed for divorce.

That case has yet to go to trial. In April 2012, Neathway was indicted on charges of lying to a grand jury. She has alleged in a countersuit that Cashman hacked into her email and threatened to have her committed—every detail widely reported in New York. In June she was convicted on nine counts, including grand larceny, in a separate case involving housing fraud, and faces a possible sentence of 15 years.

"I'm not going to talk about it," Cashman says of his case. "I'm thankful it's in the hands of the district attorney's office. That's all I've ever said publicly, and since that time I've been under siege."

The Yankees have stood behind Cashman. Friends and family have watched him closely ever since, waiting for a crack. It hasn't



END OF THE AFFAIR

Cashman and Mary (above) split in 2012, after his affair with Neathway (above, left), who is facing stalking and extortion charges.



happened. "The Jeter thing was tough on him, and he never wavered with the personal stuff either," says Jimmy Patsos, Cashman's old basketball buddy from Catholic says. "Some guys break down or they have a come-to-Jesus. But he's always been the same guy."

Every so often, on his lunch hour, Cashman will pedal his five-gear bike along the West Side Highway, six miles down past 42nd Street and back north again. He nearly got crushed once: Somebody ran a stop sign near Dinosaur Bar-B-Que. He doesn't wear a helmet. "Adrenaline junkie," Cashman says, and taken with the skydiving and high-rise scaling and the rogue f-bomb and everything else, it's easy to assume a cliché. "I tease him: 'You're too young for a midlife crisis,'" says Yankees president Randy Levine.

"I call it living," Cashman says.

So he hands shock pens to unsuspecting new scouts. He invents fake transactions for Hal and Levine, like the one in 2006 when he moaned for 10 minutes that the Mets had drafted pitcher Dellin Betances, now a star reliever for New York. Or, in the final few minutes before first pitch one night in July, Cashman walks outside his office to the corner between suites 45 and 46, near the giant photos of Andy Pettitte being heroic. He backs up to a nearby wall. A cluster of fans wanders by, and he clicks the button on a key-ring-sized remote. The sound is loud, unmistakable: They start and redden and wonder, Who just...? Cashman howls. A woman walks over.

"What're you doing?" she says.

"Putting my fart machine on," Cashman says.

He keeps pressing the button. Heads swivel, eyes narrow: Did you...? A small crowd gathers. Jim Leyritz, World Series hero of 1996, big homer in Game 4, back in baseball after years of turmoil, wanders up. The two men talk pitching, but Cashman's thumb has a job to do.

"I got my fart machine," he says.

"Is that what that is?" Leyritz says.

"This is my therapy, right here."

A couple and a child: Gotcha! Cashman scans the hall for the next victim. Is it time?... *Now!* "Too many burritos!" a man yells. He's got to stop: First pitch soon, big game against the Orioles tonight. Time to honor the job description. But a part of him, the 10-year-old part, would be happy to stay here all night. □

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Dating Game

→ BY STEVE RUSHIN

MICHAEL JORDAN was born on the same day in 1963 as Larry the Cable Guy, which explains their fraternal-twin slogans of *Just do it* and *Git 'er done*. But Jordan was also born 27 years to the day after Jim Brown, so that the best basketball player of all time and the best football player of all time both entered the world on Feb. 17, making it the single most auspicious date on the sports calendar.

Or not, because LeBron James, Tiger Woods and Sandy Koufax were all born on Dec. 30, which is also the day (in 1968) that Frank Sinatra recorded “My Way.” Through it all, when there was doubt, those four ate it up and spit it out.

But the *best* sports day? That has to be Oct. 3, when the sports polymath Dave Winfield was born in 1951 within hours of Bobby Thomson’s hitting his Shot Heard ’Round the World—and the same date in 1974 that Frank Robinson became baseball’s first black manager and that (in 1863) President Lincoln proclaimed Thanksgiving a national holiday, for which football fans are forever grateful, though not as grateful as they are for buffalo wings, which were invented in 1964 at the Anchor Bar in Buffalo on—deep breath—Oct. 3.

Except that it isn’t even the best date of that week, when you consider that Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier fought the 1975 Thrilla in Manila on Oct. 1, and Babe Ruth called his shot in the 1932 World Series on Oct. 1, and Roger Maris hit his 61st home run on Oct. 1 to break Ruth’s single-season record, which would in turn be broken by Mark McGwire, who was born—yes—on Oct. 1. Pelé retired on Oct. 1, and Disney World opened on Oct. 1 to give every Super Bowl MVP a place to go.

But is it the best day ever? Feb. 6 witnessed two good Super Bowls—Patriots over Eagles by three in XXXIX, Packers over Steelers by six in XLV—and Jordan’s dunk from the foul line in the 1988 Slam Dunk Contest in Chicago, striking the pose forever frozen as Nike’s Jumpman logo. But it’s best known as Babe Ruth’s birthday, and for that reason alone it could be a national holiday, if there wasn’t already one—July 4—devoted to serial hot-dog eating, beer and America.

Every day is an epic history. The date on this very issue,

Oct. 3 is the date of the Shot Heard ’Round the World and the birthday of Dave Winfield, Thanksgiving and buffalo wings. And it’s not even the best sports date that week.



What’s the most auspicious sports date on the calendar?

Join the discussion on Twitter by using **#SIPointAfter** and following **@SteveRushin**

Aug. 24, saw Cal Ripken Jr. born and Pete Rose banned, instantly evoking indelible numbers (2,632 and 4,256) and nicknames (Charlie Hustle, Hit King, Iron Man) worthy of Vince McMahon, who was also born this day.

Some dates are notorious: Diego Maradona scored his infamous Hand of God goal on June 22, 1986, five years to the day after John McEnroe told Wimbledon chair umpire Edward James, “You cannot be serious!” Other dates make strange but wonderful bedfellows. Secretariat took Belmont on June 9 to win the Triple Crown, the same date Giants manager Mel Ott won the Double Crown, getting ejected from both games of a doubleheader. Wilt Chamberlain scored 100 points on Dr. Seuss’s birthday, March 2, a shotgun-wedding anniversary of Wilt the Stilt and Yertle the Turtle.

The U.S. Olympic hockey team beat the Soviet Union on Feb. 22, 1980, in America’s greatest sports victory, which happened to fall on George Washington’s birthday. The waving flags in Lake Placid called to mind the one rippling in Washington’s boat as he crossed the Delaware—the hockey team and the Father of Our Country united by national pride, frozen water and fake teeth.

After Washington, the man most associated with ’76 is Julius Erving, also born on Feb. 22 and always—as a Philadelphia 76er or a New York Net—swaddled in stars and stripes.

Feb. 22 is also the day the Beatles recorded the famous final note of “A Day in the Life.” This was in 1967, the Late Winter of Love, when five men played a thunderous E major chord on three pianos and a harmonium at the same time, providing the best sound on the best song on the best band’s best album, on what may be the best day ever. At the very least it’s further proof there’s a Life in the Day, every day of the year. □



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